

THE WIND AND THE FLAME

SOME PRESS OPINIONS OF THIS BOOK

published in the United States of America

under the title

THE BURNED BRAMBLE

'There can be no pleasure greater than to come upon a really important work of fiction, and there can be no duty greater than to say so. I can recall offhand three times in my life when I had the experience and said so in print. The first novel for which I went all out was called *Babbitt*; the second was called *An American Tragedy*; the third, a decade or so later, was called *The Grapes of Wrath*. I have no hesitation in putting *The Burned Bramble* in this class. It is both timely and timeless.'

UPTON SINCLAIR (*The New York Times Book Review*)

'*The Burned Bramble* belongs to the select group of novels which have best explained why and how the good Communists become dead ones (others: Arthur Koestler's *Darkness at Noon*, Victor Serge's *The Case of Comrade Tulayev*).'

Time

'He, too, shows darkness at noon, but before showing you darkness, he makes you feel the air of what once looked like dawn to him and his comrades.'

The Saturday Review of Literature

'*The Burned Bramble* evokes inevitably Koestler's *Darkness at Noon*. . . . The new religion of our times, already bloodied with so many million victims, is shown up by its apostates, its Koestlers, Silences, Gides, and Sperbers, to be the greatest swindle in history.'

The New York Herald Tribune Book Review

THE WIND. AND THE FLAME

by

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WINGATE
London & New York

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FOR JENKA

THE LEGEND OF THE BUSH BURNED OUT

... AND so there were many who began to cry out that the days of darkness had lasted too long; they had endlessly awaited the fulfilment of the announcement of happiness, the coming of the promise of light. And they said:

'Come, let us build our homes around this bush that has burned throughout the ages. The days of darkness are over; the fiery bush will blaze for all eternity and will never turn to ash.'

Thus spoke the bravest, those in whom lived the future like the unborn child in its mother's womb, those who did not ask the oracle: 'What will happen?' but relied on their own courage and their own high feelings for the answer to the question: 'What shall we do?'

Everywhere they met obstacles and enmity, yet there were many who followed them up the steep and rocky path that led to the burning bush. And they settled close to it that they might live by its light.

Now it happened that one by one the branches were consumed and fell in ashes to the ground. Even the roots were burned out and became cold cinders. And once again there was darkness and cold.

Then voices were raised, crying:

'See how our hopes have been deceived! We have been betrayed!
Let us find the guilty.'

The new masters ordered all who had so spoken to be put to death, saying:

'He who shall arise and pretend the bush is burned out shall die a shameful death. For it is only the enemy who cannot see the light of the bush, only the traitor who is cold before its heat.'

That is what the new masters proclaimed, standing on the heap of ashes. A great light enveloped them, thrown by the torches which the new slaves held high in their hands.

Then others arose, in whom lived the future like the unborn child in its mother's womb, and they said:

'The bush is burned out because there are masters and slaves among us once again . . . even though we do not call them by those names. Deceit and baseness are with us, and humiliation and the lust for power. Come, let us go elsewhere and start again from the beginning.'

Meanwhile the new masters ordered their slaves to sing, everywhere

and at all times, the praises of the burning bush. From among the shadows their psalms rose: 'For us the light shines brighter than ever before.' They shivered with cold, and yet they sang: 'We are warmed by the everlasting fires of the bush.'

The new serfs of the new masters were sent forth to hunt out and destroy all those who spoke the truth, to blot out in infamy the names of those who talked of making a fresh start. They killed many, and yet they could not destroy hope, hope that is as old as sorrow and as young as undawned morning.

'Somewhere there is another bush. We must search for it.'

So spoke the hidden voices, and on their heels came the pursuers, the serfs both of the old masters and the new..

'We must start again, even if we have to plant a new bush.'

Blessed be those who speak such words! May the stones be not too cruel to their feet; may their courage equal our suffering!

Thus spoke the stranger before leaving us again. We have tried to forget him as quickly as we can, him and his bitter-tasting hopes. We are weary of starting over and over again.

PART ONE

The Useless Journey

CHAPTER I

JOSMAR, with an impatient gesture, opened the long window. Part of the cloud of smoke that filled the room blew out into the street, while its place was taken by the fresh, slightly damp, night air. He stepped out on to the balcony and looked to see if the black two-seater car was parked in its usual place beneath the street-lamp. It wasn't. Only the light of the lamp lay reflected in the wet asphalt. He glanced upwards and noticed in the sky the glow of the city's many lights.

The sight of the disarranged chairs and the round table reminded him of his exhaustion during the past couple of hours. He tidied up the room, thinking as he did so that he had already forgotten the faces of the six men and of the woman. Yet it was only a few minutes since he had been attempting to engrave their features on his memory for ever, those people who used for names the seasons of the year and the days of the week.

The woman had had her back to the window, opposite Soennecke. Josmar had sat a little withdrawn. He was not a member of this group and there were special reasons for his being there.

One of them had called himself Herbst, the German word for autumn. Josmar recalled his large, powerful chin, his fine, very white teeth, but the rest of his face had become a blank. He wished to recollect the rest of that face. His attempt to do so increased the slight headache which had hovered all evening in the neighbourhood of his left temple.

The important thing about the meeting was the fact that Soennecke had been there. That was one face which Josmar would never forget: a clear complexion; large, grey eyes that seemed to smile even though the lips were still; a high, straight, well-shaped forehead; brown hair tinged with grey, brushed straight back; big ears, not ridiculously big, but the sort of ears a man might wiggle in order to make his children laugh, while his large mouth twisted into a smile; a chin that was curiously weak, fleshy, with a cleft in it. The neck was scrawny, the neck of an old man, the standard 'working man' of the political cartoons. He realised that during the meeting, when he had not been held by Soennecke's eyes, it was his throat that he had watched.

Everyone in the German Reich knew who he was, and all over the world many millions of working men spoke his name with love; it was a talisman, a promise.

When he was seventeen, Joseph Maria Goeben had written to him from school. Soennecke was in prison at the time, in custody. The boy had said in his letter: 'So long as people like H. S. . . . exist life has a meaning. And so long as there are young men like us in the world no prison is strong enough to hold you.' And he had enclosed a terribly long poem.

He first met him four years later. He was disappointed and his disappointment hurt him, for at twenty he could make no use of his disillusionment. This was during the fighting in the Ruhr. For many days the police, too, had been looking for Soennecke. When at last Josmar had caught up with him, Soennecke was standing in a cheap bar, a small figure in a long overcoat that was too tight, stiffly wet from the rain. Could this be he? In his left hand he held a glass of beer. This hand trembled as he blew at the froth, and the other hand was in his pocket. He swore because the beer wasn't cold enough. Could this be he?

Josmar had long prepared for this first meeting. Naturally for him to explain his emotion was out of the question, for the moment. All the same there were certain things he must say at once.

Yet his words seemed to be blown away by some emotional wind. Still, he must speak, and Josmar began to stammer as he always did when an unexpected encounter destroyed the well-ordered arrangements that his foresight had prepared against future contingencies. He said:

'I am Joseph Maria Goeben from Cologne. I wrote to you once. I am ready to do . . . I am . . . I am at your disposal.'

This last word, 'disposal', which was meant to sound quick and forceful, seemed to stick between his teeth. It was all a disaster. . . .

Only then did he notice the presence of others, tired men who were watching him sardonically. He didn't dare look Soennecke in the face lest he too were laughing at him. He saw the glass of beer being placed gently on the bar counter, and he heard a voice saying to him:

'So you've just come from Cologne. You've got a bicycle outside? Yes? Good. You'll be a messenger, a courier. Your name is Adolf, that's what all our couriers are called. You must get going right away. Now listen carefully . . . '

He met him on two other occasions during this period. Then it was all over. Soennecke had disappeared. His photograph was on the wall

of every police station and there was a price on his head. DEAD OR ALIVE – this in heavy print – he was wanted at the nearest police station.

‘The Party in Germany, too, was outlawed at one time. It grew all the stronger for it. The lazy, the weak, the half-hearted, they dropped out. Adolf here, he was only a kid then, still he can tell you some stories about those days.’

That’s what Soennecke had said this very evening to the foreign comrades, pointing towards Josmar with his damaged hand.

And when the seven had gone Herbert Soennecke had stayed behind a moment.

‘You’ve heard what’s going on down there. You’ve seen how they’ve split up into little groups, fighting among themselves. And there’s such a lot they ought to be doing. Officially your job is simply to take them the documents, listen to what they’ve got to say, and make a report when you get back here. Don’t let yourself become involved with any one group – I mean, don’t take sides in any way. But keep your eyes wide open and watch it all carefully. And try to fix it so you don’t get caught at the frontier, or shot “while attempting to escape arrest” as they call it. Off you go and good luck to you, boy.’

It was starting to rain again. Midnight was past and still the telephone hadn’t rung. Josmar might just as well have waited in bed for the call, except that he was afraid he might fall into a very heavy sleep after this exhausting evening and not hear it.

He picked up the three books, examined their bindings more closely and thought what a good job the ‘technician’ had done. All the same, someone examining them closely might notice that the binding was unusually thick and a trifle too wide. Oh, well! The technician with his expert knowledge of illegal activities must know how to do his job.

He heard a car stop outside. It was the two-seater parked in its usual place. He watched as the headlights went off. The girl got out and walked towards her house. He couldn’t tell whether she were half dancing or staggering. She opened the big door, turned and looked up at him. He knew she couldn’t see the expression on his face so he didn’t try to alter it. He sat down again and waited. He’d wait for the telephone call until one. He refused to think of Lisbeth and of how much depended on this call. To switch his thoughts he began to thumb through one of the volumes. He read: ‘Despite her ravishing beauty, no good fairy had ever stood by Mary Lou Vandering’s cradle to promise her one day she would really and truly own a castle in Spain. . . .’ He closed the book in disgust.

The front-door bell rang. So that was it. Lisbeth hadn’t called.

Instead she'd packed her bags and here she was, all ready to leave with him. She'd made, for once, a straight, clear decision. He didn't wait for the lift, but ran down the stairs and opened the street door.

'It's me. I forgot my brief-case,' the man said as he closed the heavy door behind him.

When he moved into the light Josmar recognised Freitag, one of the comrades.

It didn't take them long to find the brief-case. The stranger seemed enormously relieved. He let himself collapse into an armchair near the window, and, throwing off his hat, rubbed the sweat from his brow with the back of his hand. Gradually he relaxed. He took off his spectacles and placed them carefully on the table; then, sitting up in his chair, he proceeded to examine the room with care, as though this were the first time he had been there. Josmar followed his glance until it rested on him. The visitor was inspecting him in exactly the same way that he had examined the walls and the furniture. Josmar would have liked to say something, something friendly and unimportant to break the awkward silence, but he thought better of it. He realised that he was blushing, as he always did when shy. He ran his hands through his hair and turned his head slightly away to avoid that inquisitorial look.

'You must forgive my disturbing you. It's the first time such a thing's ever happened to me. It wasn't till I got home that I noticed I'd left it. There are important papers in that case. You're leaving first thing in the morning, you'll be in a hurry and you probably wouldn't have noticed it. Somebody might have found it, anybody, your char say . . . There's no telling what the results might have been. You see why I had to collect it, comrade? No hard feelings, eh?'

For some reason which he couldn't fathom, the calmness of the other man's voice made Josmar feel ashamed. He assured Freitag that he didn't mind his coming back in the least.

The stranger lit a cigarette. He had picked up one of the books and was weighing it in his hand.

'So you're off tomorrow. You're sticking to the schedule?'

'Yes. It seems the best way.'

'No, it's not the best way. Listen, if you'd like me to stay a moment or two . . . why don't you sit down? Otherwise I'll have to stand up.'

Josmar sat down and he didn't fail to observe that this obedient, schoolboyish gesture made Freitag smile. He decided he disliked the stranger's long, thin face. He had a fine, wide forehead that contrasted oddly with the stubbly hair, cut short all over his head. His mouth was

small, delicate, the lips curved prettily like those of a young girl, and this gave his face an appearance of strangeness, even of artificiality, for the rest of it was severe, with high cheekbones above deep shadows. He wasn't an ugly man but his face was certainly not attractive.

'I envy you, comrade. In a few days you'll be down there. You'll see our people. You probably don't know what it's like to be homesick. Seeing the people one loves only in twisted dreams, feeling that reality's slipping away because things are being done and thought at home that one knows nothing about. One writes: "I speak in the name of the workers of my country." At first it's true; one can speak for one's people, but after a while it stops being true. And what one says on their behalf stops being true too. One should know for certain before one speaks. But how can one find out? Do you speak our language?'

'Yes, a little. I spent three years there working for a German firm. I expect that's why Soennecke's sending me on this mission.'

The telephone had begun to ring while he was talking. Josmar forced himself to finish the sentence calmly. Then he picked up the phone and said who he was. It was Lisbeth. He could hardly understand what she was saying. She talked rapidly and her sentences seemed to collide and destroy each other. She always talked that way if she were making up a lie at the last moment, which she did when the lie she had already decided on seemed to her too stupid to be credible. He had to ask her to repeat what she had said; she felt awkward, became stubborn and spoke with peevish clarity. She asked him to forgive her for calling three hours late, yet her explanation sounded reproachful, as though it were somehow Josmar's fault. He said:

'Yes, yes, I understand. Of course.'

Her voice was hoarse. He waited. He heard her breathing. Then: 'I don't suppose you believe me, Josmar. But really and truly I couldn't help it, there wasn't anything else I could do. . . . You know how nervous Lora gets if I'm not there for the dress rehearsal. . . .'

'But I do believe, you, Lisbeth. I tell you, I do believe you.'

He waited again. Faintly, as though from a great distance, he heard a record of a dance tune being played and a voice singing, and then Lisbeth's voice again, weakly:

'You're off tomorrow? I mean, is it definite?'

'Yes,' he said. Then suddenly he was not sure whether he had actually said it or had merely thought it. He said again: 'Yes.'

Lisbeth's voice began faintly once more. The music became louder. All the same he did gather that she wasn't coming with him and that

the whole thing was too complicated to explain over the telephone. Then she said quite clearly:

'You don't mind, Josmar ducky, do you?'

He waited again. Silence. Now he could hear the music loud and clear. Hastily he replied: 'No', and hung up. He turned back slowly towards the table, buttoning his jacket as he did so, and sat down opposite Freitag. The telephone rang again. He got up, disconnected it, and came back to his chair. Freitag, watching him, said:

'Perhaps it's important?'

Josmar nodded and took the telephone into the other room.

He was gone about ten minutes. When he came back his expression seemed unchanged, the tenseness gone out of it. Freitag was apparently asleep. His long curved eyelashes cast clear-cut shadows on his cheeks, clear almost as if they were in relief. His elbows rested on the arms of his armchair and his hands lay tidily on the edge of the table. 'Ingenuous hands,' Josmar thought.

When he came back again with coffee the man was wide awake, but he had not taken his hands off the small round table.

He immediately began to talk, straight at Josmar, telling him a story about the peasants of Bosnia who, it seemed, are passionately enthusiastic coffee-drinkers.

While he was talking Freitag became more and more relaxed. Reaching into his brief-case he produced two long, thin rolls and handing one to Josmar, dipped the other in his coffee. Even while eating he hardly stopped talking. Perhaps he realised that this was the easiest way of breaking down the barrier between them. Josmar hurriedly collected what edibles were left in his kitchen and added them to their early breakfast. Dawn was approaching and it had grown colder. Josmar closed one of the doors. His slight headache had gone, but he felt very tired again. He was glad that he wasn't expected to talk, and he liked listening to the other man. He was surprised that he could dismiss the thought of Lisbeth so easily each time it crossed his consciousness.

It took him a few moments to realise that Freitag had stopped speaking, but when he looked at him he understood that the man wasn't expecting a reply of any sort.

It was raining again, a violent, hurried rain, as though the elements were trying to make up for the time lost. Far off the horn of an automobile hooted twice. They noticed then how the rattle of the rain against the window muffled all other sound.

'They arranged for you to take the first train in the morning to

Vienna. You'll pick up the suitcases and go on from there the day after tomorrow. The others know your movements as well as I do. Therefore, you'd be wise to change your time-table. Unfortunately you can't leave any earlier, so you'd better wait here for a day or two.'

Josmar didn't understand properly. Another couple of days in Berlin didn't appeal to him at all. He knew himself well enough to know that he might become weak, might go and look for Lisbeth. No, he had to leave, and the sooner the better.

'The comrades who know about my trip, they know a lot else as well. I don't know you . . . I mean I don't know any of your lot at all well, but I trust you. The Party put you in charge. I don't understand.'

Josmar was afraid that Freitag had fallen asleep again. He became impatient and was about to say: 'I'll stick to what was arranged. I still have two and a half hours to sleep. There's a sofa in the other room. You can stretch out there if you like.' But he noticed Freitag's mouth, open and curved in his sleep like that of a young girl, so curiously inapposite in that face. His annoyance left him and he said nothing. He scarcely dared move.

Night was ending. The tattered, raggedy grey sky was reflected in the windows, forming a dingy background to the patch of darkness that was Freitag's head.

'It's two years and a half now since the *coup d'état* of January 6, 1929. The persecution hasn't let up. On the contrary it's been organised on an efficient and apparently permanent basis. With this result. Many people were ready to fight for the cause eighteen months ago, yes and ready to die for it too, Goeben. A lot of those people won't even take a leaflet from us now. Our defeat has led to a sort of rot in the whole organisation, from top to bottom. Secret meetings, properly prepared according to all the rules laid down by the Party, are broken up by the police. Messengers to and from other countries are nabbed at the frontier, even when we are the only people who know the messengers' movements, even when the messengers are total strangers to our country, foreign comrades, an Austrian say, or a German or a Belgian or a Czech. Or, what's worse, the police let them cross the frontier, follow them and in this way pick up a whole network of our people. Or maybe they let them cross the frontier so we'll think that that's the only way the police can track us down. There's no need for panic, no need at all, but you must be very, very careful. My brother was murdered, my wife arrested and tortured: you'll see her, she's free now. It'd be a pity if anything like that happened to you.'

Freitag had got up. He went on to the balcony. He moved rather

slowly, as though he were avoiding any unnecessary exertion. Josmar was curious to see what the expression on his face was like and he followed him out. The street-lights were being switched off, and a milk-cart, squeaking and grinding, came slowly up the street.

Freitag turned and fixed a penetrating glance on Josmar. The latter did not flinch. He said:

'All right. But if you suspect something definite it's your duty to tell. It's an appalling suggestion you've just made.'

'No. You see, I've nothing definite. How long have you been a Party member?'

'Since 1923. For about three years I was inactive, but since coming back to Germany I've been doing Party work again.'

'Then you must have noticed how things have changed, or maybe just because you were out of it you haven't noticed. I don't know. But things are very different now from what they used to be.'

'In the old days, at the beginning, we were really comrades, friends who stuck together; while nowadays we seem to be behaving, and, indeed being, more and more like strangers to one another. Think of the meeting this evening. What an atmosphere! If we were closer to each other as human beings, a spy - and I don't care how clever he was - couldn't last five minutes. There are certain tones of voice that even a great actor can only put on in the theatre, not in real life. Add to that the banning of the Party. What Soennecke said about illegality had really nothing to do with the issue. The period when the Party was illegal in Germany was short and, besides, it wasn't comparable to our situation down there. A large, illegal political party is a contradiction in terms. You can't carry out a true conspiracy in a real mass movement. You can't even try. But what we want is to influence the masses. For a time we must keep out of the light. All the same we mustn't let them forget us, we must make the headlines now and then. We have to prove that the Party's still alive, and we have to prove it in a way the masses will understand; otherwise they'll forget us and sink back into apathy. And the enemy knows that, they don't need spies to tell them. Every proletarian festival is a St Bartholomew's Day for the police: May 1, August 1, November 7, Lenin Day, and so on; they know all the dates. Sewn into those books you've got the text for the August 1 proclamation. The enemy knows such a text exists, even without the spies' reports. He knows because he can look at a calendar. Naturally he doesn't care what it says in the text, it's just the usual anti-war stuff again; but he does know and he does care that round about August 1 is a good season for catching so and so many

militant communists, who'll naturally be among the bravest we have. If we didn't have these festivals and demonstrations, the enemy would have to invent them.

'There are spies, so be careful. But that's not the chief danger to the Party. The chief danger is what we are doing ourselves.'

Josmar was wide awake by now and making a great effort to grasp all the implications in what the other man was saying. During the meeting Freitag had been constantly in disagreement with the others, and had been defeated on every point. And now he was apparently trying to persuade Josmar not to carry out the instructions that the others had given him. The obvious answer was to let him go on talking and to give a full report of what he said to Soennecke. He was an oppositionist, probably a rightist deviationist, in reality a liquidator. For the first time in his life Josmar saw clearly what the phrase 'an enemy of the Party' actually meant. There was one now, sitting right across the table from him. Josmar said:

'Perhaps you're right. But in that case what do you suggest? What else can we do? Give up all action? Save the key members of the Party and meanwhile let the Party itself dissolve?'

Freitag walked across the room and switched off the light which was no longer necessary. He moved with care as if afraid of waking someone. He was tall and very thin. From time to time he hunched and lowered his narrow shoulders as though his back were cold.

'What do your friends call you?'

'Josmar.'

• 'You were brought up a Catholic?'

'Yes. My father was very devout. My mother got that way as she grew older, too.'

'My family is Greek Orthodox. There's a world of difference you know. We have no Jesuits, no "ends excuse the means". My name, incidentally, is Vasso.'

Josmar couldn't make out what he was driving at. His distrust increased. Perhaps this sly fellow was beginning to realise how careless he had been? Was he trying to cover up his political heresies with a personal conversation? He thought it was up to him to ask some questions, so as to hide his suspicions.

'Does your family still live down there? Have they left them alone?'

'Yes, they leave them alone. I come of a big peasant family. Almost everybody in the village is related to almost everybody else, so the one policeman there has to be a bit careful. Anyhow they've got nothing against my family. The eldest son, the professor - that's me - you

know what they say about me? They say I was responsible for my younger brother's death. They say that even as a deputy in Parliament I have to hide for months on end like a common criminal. They say that I, a Serb, took the side of the Croats against my own people.

'No, I'm much more of a foreigner to them than are the policemen who are looking for me. If I went there now, they'd hide me, they'd kill any policeman before they'd hand me over to him, but afterwards they'd make it clear that they didn't think of me as one of themselves any more. My father said to me one day: "You communists, perhaps you want to do good, but you've got no pity for the poor: You haven't even got any pity for yourselves, and that's why you think you can do whatever you want. Our Saviour had no pity for Himself, but He did love human beings: you people, you love nobody and nobody loves you!"'

'What did you say to that?' Josmar asked, and his voice was clear, quite different from what it had been a few minutes before.

'I replied: "Possibly. Perhaps you're right. On the other hand it may be that one can't save humanity if one loves it over much. Our Lord tried to save the world and failed. To die for mankind, Father, that's not enough. One has to kill for mankind too. To be a saviour is a sort of curse. The world is so bad that its saviours, in order to succeed, cannot possibly be good men."

'What did he say?' asked Josmar.

'My father? He's a sharp old debater. No priest could ever be sure of coming out on top in an argument with him. As a matter of fact he's not a genuine believer. So he shrugged his shoulders as though to imply that the conversation was over and said: "Who chose you to save us? Not us at any rate. You want to deliver us, us little people. Well and good. But the Devil has always maintained that he was the true God and no doubt he believes that himself. Your lot, you're just a collection of poor little devils. And you've got no pity for us."

'No, you didn't answer him properly. You got it all wrong, way off the track. In the first place you stuck to his religious jargon, and in the second place you agreed to something that was totally untrue. We have no pity for the poor? Pity's just a word, but even so don't you remember what Kroupskaia wrote about Lenin, how he had a profound pity for the people? I don't understand how you can take such clerical clap-trap seriously. Furthermore . . .'

His sentence remained unfinished, suspended in mid-air. Josmar had spoken with great violence. Now he was trying to fight off a feeling of growing uneasiness. The other man was leading the conversation

where he wanted, turning off into a side-track, as it were, whenever the destination seemed about to become clear. Josmar forced himself to stay as calm as he could. Since the other man remained silent, he said:

'Furthermore, you haven't answered my question. What do you suggest in place of our illegal activities? I assume you don't propose the liquidation of the Party, "Revolution cancelled owing to rain", or something of that sort.'

Vasso took his time answering. His whole attention was concentrated on a little piece of blue sky that was visible through a rent in the heavy clouds. When at last he did answer, it was as though he were speaking, not to Josmar, but to that little blue patch above a block of Berlin flats.

'I assume you don't realise that Soennecke and I are very old friends. We've been in it, both of us, since the start. You sit there, glued to your chair, thinking you must remember everything I say so as to be able to report it to "someone responsible". But Soennecke already knows all my ideas and my doubts, just as he knows how I'd like to modify a course of action that seems to me disastrous. So let's forget all that, shall we?

'What you say about our having pity for people who're unhappy is wrong. My old man knew better. We are the people who revolt, and as such we despise the poor man who asks for pity. We want him to revolt with us. Pity makes people into social democrats. But you can't either destroy or build a society with pity. Let's go back, if you don't mind, to my clerical clap-trap. God could never have created man if He had felt pity for him. For of course God knew what man's lot would be. When life had become intolerable for mankind and men cried out for divine compassion, God sacrificed His son in order that the sufferers might pity Him. Their cries for compassion had grown so ambiguous that God absorbed, as with an enormous sponge, all the pity in the world; and the unhappy found consolation in the compassion they were allowed to feel for a God.'

'But let's leave religion out of it and talk of ourselves in our own language. You've never been in Russia. Otherwise you'd know that never in the whole history of the world has there existed a country where pity has been so ruthlessly wiped out. What else could one expect? The unhappy man, asking for compassion, is, willy-nilly, a counter-revolutionary. He would rather stand in a church doorway and hold out his hand for alms, while he should be using his hands to build a new world.'

'When you deliver your documents down there you'll be starting a chain of events that'll certainly cause hundreds of years of imprisonment and an unimaginable amount of suffering. Doesn't that make you stop and think? At this very moment in my country there are comrades getting out of their warm beds, kissing their wives and children and setting off to work. They can still do that and the sky at least is theirs. And you, inside those rather poorly made false bindings, you're carrying their future misery. Do you feel any pity for those men? And even if you did, would you allow your emotions to interfere in any way with what you are going to do? No, of course you wouldn't. So don't talk to me about pity. We are condemned to feel no pity, and to expect none either.'

Josmar was moved. All the same he didn't for a moment forget that all this was quite irrelevant, and that Freitag was talking rubbish. For the rest, as he knew perfectly well, neither theology nor God had anything to do with the business in hand. The Party had its line and you obeyed it. Or you didn't. And in that case you were the enemy of the only revolutionary organisation in existence - and, instead, the enemy of the whole working class.

'But is there any alternative to illegal activity? There are casualties, naturally, but surely it's the only possible way and certainly the only one that can produce results.'

Josmar has spoken rather hesitantly.

'Results? Who can tell? You'll see for yourself down there. Soennecke trusts your powers of observation. We'll talk it over when you get back. Let's leave it for now. Well, have you decided to change your time-table for the trip?'

'Yes.'

'Good, I'm very glad. Now it's time I was getting along. The underground will be running soon.'

Josmar went down with him to unlock the front door. The pavement was already almost dry. In front of the house opposite there was a small patch of sunshine, where a cat was sleeping. They both glanced at it, and when their eyes met they smiled as though they were already old friends. They said goodbye. A thought crossed Josmar's mind: 'He realised that I was going to report his conversation.' He blushed and wished to withdraw his hand from Vasso's, but the latter held on to it firmly, saying:

'You needn't worry about me, Josmar, I'll never leave the Party. After all, what else is there in the world besides the Party for us? *Zivio, tovarich!*'

Josmar followed him with his eyes. He walked down the street, his brief-case clutched to his side, his shoulders hunched as though he were fighting his way through a heavy wind.

There was not a breath of wind.

CHAPTER II

I

HE awoke at first light. There were only two people left in the compartment. He must have slept deeply not to have heard the others get out. A sudden, comforting idea came to him: 'I haven't been thinking about Lisbeth at all. So at last it's really finished and I'm free.' But he wasn't going to be over-confident. He'd been fooled that way too often already. He settled down to examine his emotions carefully. No, he was sure he'd never fall into that particular trap again; the final point had been reached, there was nothing to add, the chapter was closed.

He opened the door silently and stepped into the corridor. It was still dawn. The Slavs have a diminutive and tender word for the dawn; they call it *zoroulay*. They sing a song about a girl who asks the dawn to linger, for her man came to her late and he has spent the night in loving her:

*Zoroulay,
Wake him not, my beloved,
Let my lover sleep,
Whom the night so late brought to me.*

But all the same this is not the final point, for with his mind's eye he can see her as she was, standing beneath the station clock, shivering in her raincoat. Her face is wet with tears and in that light is as yellow as her hair. She had telephoned him to meet her at the station and had been waiting. Seeing her thus, standing as though bound to the stake, he felt as though he were drowning with pity. But when he came close to her he saw that it was the rain and not her tears that had ravaged her face, and her mouth was closed and tight. His pity froze, he was as distant from her as ever.

It was always such dull, uninteresting scenes, *tableaux morts*, that his memory threw up whenever he thought to be free of the past. Here

he was, in the Berlin-Vienna express, on his way to perform a mission in a foreign country that would be very important and certainly extremely dangerous, and yet to his amazement at this point in his life he could still be preoccupied with such a matter – personal and, therefore, of secondary importance – an unhappy marriage that had long been smashed, a love that had soured too soon, that had stayed sour too long and had become as squalid as a petty, hidden hatred. Had he been able to talk with Lisbeth he would have been able to judge and condemn, but they had never succeeded. Thus only those almost static scenes from the past arose to clutter the present, recalling the verdict long ago pronounced. Thus Josmar, defenceless as in a nightmare, would have wished to ask the passing, neutral countryside to tell him what had gone wrong: ‘Whose fault was it? And if mine, what did I do wrong?’

They had gone to a café. Lisbeth had borrowed his handkerchief to dry her face. She waited in silence for breakfast to be brought. Then she ate greedily, as she always did when unhappy. A little bit of the yolk of her egg had stuck to her chin, just beneath her lip, and Josmar, looking up from his newspaper and noticing that yellow mouth, had realised with certainty that the woman opposite was a stranger, that nothing her lips might say could ever move him again.

Her voice was shrilly peevish as she said:

‘I might as well go. You don’t need me here to help you read your newspaper.’

He looked at her, saying nothing, thinking: ‘What a bore this editorial writer is. Always the same old platitudes in the same pompous manner, and dragging in the names of his titled friends without the slightest provocation. . . .’

Before letting her walk off into the rain he should have asked her why she had telephoned him. He thought of it too late.

‘To escape from the tyranny of these remembered scenes, all I need is to get back to simple facts,’ Josmar decided. But it didn’t always work out that way.

He had met Lisbeth in the Party. He was attracted by the young working girl, and she by him, and so they were married. That was several years ago. He got a job in a foreign country, some Godforsaken hole in the Balkans. They neither of them minded that. He decided they should make the most of their time abroad, their long evenings alone together. He would instruct Lisbeth until she too would be capable of fulfilling a useful purpose in the Party. The scheme was a flop. Lisbeth grew bored. She struck up friendships with the wives of

the other engineers, but they usually broke down in quarrels. She became rude to the maid and grew in general intolerable. Only then did Josmar realise that he didn't like the woman he loved. After two years he sent her back to Berlin. He himself had contracted to spend another year abroad.

While she was in Berlin she got into the theatrical business. She lived with a stage manager, then with an actor, then with an 'experimental dramatic artist' who always just happened to be out of work. When Josmar returned to Berlin, Lisbeth came back to live with him. Her health had suffered from a clumsily performed abortion; she no longer believed in her vocation as an actress and had given up the stage. She really needed a great deal of sympathy and help, but her unhealthy pride refused to accept it, for she felt sympathy to be somehow humiliating. She was convalescent for six months and then her desire for 'a change' took the upper hand again. She left Josmar 'for ever'. Beaten and exhausted she came back 'for ever'. At last she joined up with a young actress with whose husband she was having an affair. Although she really had no feeling of friendship for this woman, she clung to her. Just before Josmar's departure she was supposed to be coming back to him 'for ever'. She hadn't done so because of her friend's dress rehearsal, the eternal dress rehearsal. . . .

Josmar, a fully competent dialectician so far as the checks and twists of the Party were concerned, believed in the complete simplicity and straightforwardness of facts when thinking about his private life. That was why he could not rid himself of these persistent memories. When he was a child, he would sometimes wake in the middle of the night and be frightened lest he had hurried through his evening prayers too fast, thus incurring divine displeasure; he would lie in bed, his anxiety growing, until at last, shivering with cold as he knelt on the hard floor, he would force himself to repeat the lot, slowly, all over again. Yet Josmar suspected no analogy between his childhood and the sordid series of partings and reconciliations into which his marriage had degenerated.

He took Vasso's advice and decided to spend two days in Vienna. He intended seeing no one except the 'technician' who was to give him the special suitcase. He did not plan to look up a certain old friend of long ago. Ten years of silence, following on a boyhood disappointment, had cut the bond between them, even though it was this friend

who had enabled Josmar to grow up at last and had showed him that his life need not be unhappy.

They first met at the well-known Lenzdorf boarding-school. Edi Rubin was seventeen years old when he came upon Josmar, then thirteen, fighting a group of boys who were trying to snatch his gold cross from his neck. The Jewish atheist saved the little Catholic's cross for him. That was the beginning of a friendship between two quite dissimilar boys. It was a friendship that could have lasted, since he who gave had no desire other than to give while he who received knew nothing of giving and had himself nothing to give:

Seven years later Josmar went to Vienna in order to be near his friend. Edi, in wise and gentle words that Josmar hadn't understood, sent him home again: 'One begins a new life by fighting, not by running away.' So Josmar went back to Germany and soon found his way of life, thanks to Soennecke, in a struggle of quite another sort. But for Rubin he had vanished.

An accident, unconsciously deliberate perhaps, brought them together all the same. Josmar was sitting on a bench in a small square, the bench where last he had sat with his friend ten years before. There Edi, leaving his house, saw him.

This chance encounter led to long conversations between them. Edi introduced him to other people, including some who lived in one of the great blocks of flats put up by the Socialist Municipality. He got to know Relly, Edi's girl. She was young and yet mature, with clear, honest eyes and light-brown hair brushed back smoothly from off her forehead, the skin of her face firm and fresh over the fine bone-structure. He took him, too, to a birthday party where there were many guests and the drinking was heavy. With these various people Josmar found himself involved in conversations and arguments that should have shown him how narrow were his horizons, how isolated the revolution for which he was making this conspiratorial journey. In the Party things had reached the point where a man who didn't accept the views of the Party in their totality was liable to an irrevocable condemnation of heresy: the man who showed the slightest symptoms of doubt proved not only that he was one of the enemy, but that he was one of the enemy's vanguard. Furthermore Josmar was incapable of admitting that others might have their own opinions. He proclaimed and he condemned, as has been the custom of sectarians throughout the ages.

Edi, in the intervening years, had become a well-known biologist, even celebrated in certain circles, and he soon recognised the change

in his old⁹ friend. He avoided the temptation to irony offered by Josmar's dogmatic statements, for he realised that Josmar was defending a new gold cross.

'No! The Party never lies. The Party consists of what is best in us its members. It is only what is evil in us that can lead us astray and make us revolt against the Party. The Party itself is infallible!'

Thus spoke the young man.

'Perhaps what you say is true,' replied Edi. He was avoiding disagreement, for he wished to recreate the atmosphere of their old friendship.

Edi buried his chfn in the palms of his hands. Josmar looked at those pudgy hands, unusually hairy, and he felt a twinge of disgust, even as he was attracted by the long thin fingers that contrasted so oddly with the rest. Edi wore a very large gold ring, studded with rubies, and Josmar thought that the hands, the fingers and the ring were together symbolic of Edi, symbolic perhaps of all Jews of his type.

'I don't care for this ring either, Josmar. When my uncle put it on my finger after my father's death I intended to take it off as soon as I decently could. But I've kept it on. Also I wanted to give up the appalling flat I inherited, but I'm still there. I planned to get rid of our maid, but she's still there too. So you see I've changed nothing. Once my parents had gone I stopped disliking their things. I think I'd even miss the barracks across the street if it were pulled down one day.'

'You never married?'

'No. Do you remember Regina, my great passion? The whole business became a farce. As time went on there was a whole group of us in love with her, "the Knights of St Regina". Poems were dedicated to her, one of us even took up poetry as his profession. Another man, in her honour, wrote, and indeed still rewrites over and over again, a best-seller in the style of Knut Hamsun, naturally with a few minor alterations to the plot. A third composed a symphony that flopped. With Regina to inspire us we did all sorts of things. I had a crack at the Arts myself, but without success. Anyhow, I had made a certain reputation through my work on rejuvenation, a reputation I may say that was more or less accidental and certainly premature; it took me years of hard work to get rid of that silly, bogus notoriety. Thank God the Rubin Method is now mercifully forgotten. Well, it was for love of Regina that I was in such a tearing hurry to rejuvenate the world.'

'As for Regina herself, our muse, she was ready to listen to anything: my stupid stuff about rejuvenation, this chap's poems, that one's novels, a refutation of the Theory of Relativity, a couple of political speeches, all the bric-à-brac that intellectuals lay at the feet of the "unique

marvel", which is what she was for us. I don't think one of us stopped to wonder whether she understood what was said to her, or even if she was interested in it. She was such a good listener that she encouraged us to be bold in our ideas even if we weren't brilliant. Only one member of this Knighthood was nothing, a real nobody, by which I mean he was a business man. When he spoke it was a banality: when he uttered the name Regina, that unique and marvellous name, he said it as though it were Joan or Mary. So we didn't count him as a rival. He was just useful. He'd bring out her shawl when she sat in the garden at night, for we were so enraptured by her presence that we tended to overlook such trifles. And, of course, he was the one she married. And as for him, he married her for her money pure and simple.'

Moved by some strange desire to show himself to his friend without disguise, Edi was continually confiding little incidents from his past. At first Rubin's character seemed to Josmar a comparatively simple one, one that could be put together from these incidents like a jigsaw puzzle. But he soon saw that this was not the case. Edi had continued to pay court assiduously to the legendary Regina, yet at the same time he was in love with Relly, a talented writer according to Edi; he was waiting until she felt finally free from a man who had left her, without a word of explanation, a few years before. This man was called Denis Faber, a militant communist, of whom Josmar had heard but whom he had never met. As for Edi, he had plenty of patience and he was prepared to wait.

Rubin expressed admiration for the few hundred active communists in the world. He regarded them as exceptional beings, since they were prepared to pay the highest price, and that without bargaining, for their passionate attachment to the cause. All the same, and using careful terms so as not to offend his friend's susceptibilities, he criticised ironically the politic of violence and sectarianism that the Party pursued. As a matter of fact he was equally scathing and even more sarcastic about the Socialist Party, but all the same he was a good socialist. He gave lectures and helped to organise the medical end of the socialists' combat units. When Josmar asked for his assistance in the matter of the Balkan communists he didn't refuse, though he did lay down one condition:

"Tell this to whomever has any authority among the people who sent you to me. I shall do what I can, obviously in cases of which I don't disapprove, but on one condition which must be previously fulfilled. Over there in Russia there lives a man whom I consider to be the most brilliant biologist and the finest human being I have ever met. This

man of learning has been sent to some foul hole where he is dying. Let them set him free and allow him to live abroad, at least for a few months; he needs it badly. He has no interest in politics and the Russian government has absolutely no reason to be afraid of him. That I can swear: If they'll let him out, I give you my word that I'll make myself useful to you in any way I can. Do you get me? His name is Ivan G. Gorenko. His case is certainly well known in the proper circles.'

'I'll do what I can: After all, you're really one of us. You're on our side of the barricades, not on theirs.'

'And what if my real position is between the barricades?'

'Not possible. Both sides'd shoot you.'

'And if I'd rather be killed myself than kill somebody else?'

'No. You want to live. You want to be happy. Don't you, Edi?'

'Maybe. Maybe not. Who knows?'

And once again he cupped his chin in the palms of his two hands.

Edi Rubin's mother had doubtless been active in various charitable organisations. Josmar found that Edi, too, was a philanthropist and was remarkably well informed about the hardships of the working class. He went into details on the subject, while showing his friend over one of the blocks of working-men's flats that the Vienna Socialist Municipality had put up. Edi was proud of those buildings. Josmar seemed scarcely interested and described them as 'a reformer's trick to throw dust in the eyes of the proletariat'. This was too much for Rubin. He took Josmar by both shoulders and almost shouted:

'You people disgust me. I daresay you're honest but you're crooks for all that. You ask your fellow men to live in filthy misery and to die at your orders so that their grandchildren can live in an earthly paradise. But how about us? Aren't we somebody's grandchildren? And our ancestors, hadn't they got any grandparents? Why don't you think about our few years on this planet and forget about our remote descendants? In any case we won't have any remote descendants if you people go on behaving the way you do.'

The point about grandchildren Josmar happened to have read just the other day in an article by some Viennese dramatic critic. Since Edi had to fall back on such an argument, taken from such a source, it was obvious that he hadn't bothered to think out what he was saying. And anyhow, what good did he think it would do to introduce Josmar to a Socialist Party official, a workman who lived in one of those flats?

Hofer, the workman, was neither unpleasant nor stupid. This made the discussion between them all the more painful. They talked about the plebiscite in Prussia which the Nazis had organised in order to

overthrow the Socialist Coalition Government there. 'At first the communists had been against the plebiscite, calling it an 'insolent provocation', but from one day to the next they had changed their tune and were now telling the workers that it was their duty to vote with the Nazis and against the government.

Josmar explained to Hofer that the socialists were traitors, social-fascists, and therefore enemy number one of the working class. Edi, who was several times on the point of interrupting, sat in silence. It was his custom to follow every experience through to the end. The tension among them was increased by the arrival of a small, freckled man with red hair whom Hofer introduced as a Ukrainian comrade, recently arrived from Poland. Hans, as Hofer called him, soon joined in the argument. He obviously hadn't been listening at the keyhole, yet he clearly knew all about Josmar's point of view. Edi assumed that the words his friend was using were not his own but part of a specialised jargon.

It was a rough passage of arms. Josmar might be greatly lacking in security so far as private affairs went; on a subject such as this he seemed proof against all doubts, prepared against all arguments.

'No,' he repeated, looking Hans straight in the eyes: 'Stalin doesn't make mistakes, the Comintern doesn't make mistakes. The Comintern decided, and correctly, that the Nazi successes of September 14, 1930, were their high water mark and that the Nazi party is already in decline. By its very nature the Comintern can't be wrong.'

Certainly the Ukrainian had taken part in many such conversations before, all of which had proved fruitless. His narrow face seemed to grow even narrower, and his expression became one of bitter irony mingled with sad irritation, as he spoke:

'Your famous dialectic, your sophistry (which is that of the bankrupt who is about to assassinate his baffled creditors) is simply the dialectic of a bad memory. You forget your ignominious failures - failures that could easily have been avoided - Italy, China, Poland, Bulgaria, Estonia, and so on. So the Comintern wasn't wrong when it made an alliance with Chiang Kai-Shek and handed the workers of Shanghai over to his gang of murderers? They weren't wrong when they ordered a *putsch* in Canton at the one moment when "by its very nature" it had no earthly hope of success. And "by its very nature" the Nazi party has only a short life ahead of it. The fact that this short life will be long enough for them to drown the workers' movement in its own blood, your dialecticians don't give a damn about that. For them the blood of the workers comes cheaper than the ink in the printing presses that they

need to turn their defeats into victories. And anyone who tells the truth is branded as a counter-revolutionary, the vanguard of the counter-revolution in the ranks of the proletariat. That's what your precious dialectic amounts to.'

'Indeed that is our dialectic, and what is more it's obvious that you are a counter-revolutionary and that you're more dangerous and disgusting than an open fascist. It's impossible for us to talk. There are other weapons than words, and they'll be the ones to decide between us.'

That was the end of the discussion. Hofer said the final word:

'The comrade you just called a fascist is a good and brave revolutionary. They fixed him up in Poland so that you couldn't bear looking at his body. I know that sort of thing means nothing to you people. All you're interested in is "other weapons". You'd happily smash the whole working-class movement if you had the power to do so. Excuse me, Rubin, but I can't say I enjoy hearing a comrade such as Hans insulted like that in my own home.'

Josmar spent one more day in Vienna. The relationship between him and his friend grew easier. He tried several times without success to talk to Rubin about Lisbeth and his marriage, but with Relly there he found himself talking instead, and at length, about the woman who lived opposite him, the one who had the two-seater car. He didn't know why this was.

Rubin and Relly saw him off at the station. They both promised not to let another ten years go by without a meeting. They would write and so forth. But they spoke without conviction.

To cheer Edi up, after Josmar had left, Relly said to him:

'What they call faithfulness to the cause destroys their faithfulness to friends or lovers.'

'You mean Faber?' Edi answered.

'No. I was thinking of your Josmar.'

'Oh, Josmar. I never saw his father Herr Goeben, Counsellor to the Supreme Court, but when Josmar was talking to the Ukrainian he was neither more nor less than Herr Goeben Senior, browbeating, bullying, and insulting some poor devil in the dock. The communists will go far.'

It didn't take Josmar long to find the travel agency. It was on a big square, where a noisy market was being held. He stood outside for a moment, looking at the posters while trying to see what was going on

in the agency. It seemed to be empty and he went in with a certain hesitancy. A young girl got up. He could not have seen her from the street for she had been seated behind a high desk. He took off his hat and looked around. They were alone. That simplified matters.

He asked for a prospectus and, as she handed it to him, said:

'Haven't we met somewhere before?'

At first she seemed about to snub him, but then she changed her mind, smiled and answered:

'Yes. In the Spreewald, I think.'

It was the reply he had been told to expect. He went on:

'At Whitsun, in the year . . .'

'1928,' she said. 'In 1928 at the Hotel . . .'

'Fischer,' said Josmar. And that was the end of the prearranged code.

'It's a good job you came so early. The other girl will be here any minute now. Someone will come to your hotel for the suitcase this evening. The other documents you're to take down there yourself.'

She spoke quickly without looking at him, since her eyes were fixed on the door. She handed him a prospectus.

'The hotel's on the coast. They'll find you. Here all hell's let loose. Some Croatian terrorists threw a bomb. The police are combing the whole town. All the comrades at all well known have gone. Take the first train tomorrow morning. Don't try to see any of our people here. You may be being followed. Yes, I can recommend this hotel strongly. Naturally, we don't offer any guarantee . . . But in our opinion it's a thoroughly first-class place. German is spoken. Private beach, tennis, all modern conveniences.'

'It sounds just what I want. Would you be so good as to reserve me a room?'

Josmar nodded in recognition of a *Good morning* from the other employee, who had just entered. The door opened again and a middle-aged couple came and stood by Josmar at the counter. He paid for his ticket and gave the girl the room number and name of his hotel, so that she could let him know about the reservation. She had assumed the affable manner appropriate to tourist agency clerks. She put his ticket in an envelope, along with a prospectus, and handed it to him. He thought that she was really very good at her job. Finally she recommended a visit to the museum and to the zoological gardens and a walk in the outskirts of the town. Josmar thanked her in a friendly fashion, but didn't succeed in catching her eye.

Out in the street he felt vaguely dissatisfied and nervous. He took a few steps and stopped before a perfume shop full of mirrors; so far as

he could see he wasn't being followed. He had a long empty day ahead of him. What to do? He knew no one here and he had no desire to go sightseeing. He ambled back to his hotel and went up to his room. He had bought some illustrated magazines on the way, and, lying down on the sofa, he glanced through them, looking with boredom at the pictures of naked women. He remembered how at fifteen or sixteen he had derived a thrill from such pictures. He would not have dared to look at them in the presence of anyone else, lest he give himself away. Does being grown up merely mean that the sight of strange naked women leaves you cold? Relly had treated him as a creature devoid of imagination. But it wasn't so. How about the woman with the two-seater car?

Thinking of her he saw again what he had seen so often, the unknown-woman doing her exercises, naked, near her window in the room across the street from his. She must know that he saw her. Perhaps he should have spoken to her. If he were to do so one day, she could hardly be surprised. Sometimes she took sun baths on her balcony. She would smile, stretched out in the *chaise longue*, and it seemed to Josmar that she was smiling at him.

He took up the illustrated papers again and began to read a story of which a gentleman cracksman was the hero. He fell asleep.

At last the day was over. He had slept a long time, had lunched in a small restaurant, not a bad lunch, gone to the zoo, sat for hours in a café, read the German papers, had another meal, taken another walk.

Now it was late and he waited in his room for the stranger who would come to take the suitcase.

In the morning he had had a feeling of triumph: it was gone by now. He felt somehow let down, exhausted by the unaccustomed heat. But it was something more than just that. He had expected important encounters in this town, meetings that were to have brought him nearer to his goal. Instead he found himself forced into the rôle of a bored tourist. He had to stay in this room waiting for God knows what. Suppose no one came? What was he supposed to do with the suitcase then? The girl had said nothing about that. And how would he recognise the man who was to come and collect it?

He looked out of the window. There were few people about. A couple approached, their arms so tightly around one another that it was remarkable that they could walk at all. A moment later another couple came the opposite way, from the public gardens. The woman was leaning heavily on the man's arm. He, whistling a popular tune, lengthened his stride so that she could scarcely keep step with him. His

arm she might still have, but the rest of the man she had already lost.

A young girl came out of a house with a dog. ~~with a dog. up the garden~~ over her shoulder as though she were expecting someone. She forgot the dog, and when she noticed its absence ran to look for it in an adjoining street. The dog wasn't there. She ran back to the main street, out of breath by this time, and called the creature, only to scold it in an impatient and angry tone of voice when it ran up to her, wagging its tail.

From an upper storey a piercing woman's voice screamed something, and the girl replied:

'All right, all right, I'm just coming.'

She went in a doorway, reappeared for a minute, glanced up the street and disappeared again.

There was a knock at the door. At last! But it was only the floor waiter, the one who had brought Josmar his breakfast.

'What's that?'

'Your coffee, sir.'

'There must be some mistake. I didn't order anything.'

The waiter put the tray down on the table before turning and looking at Josmar. In his hand he held a scrap of paper, half of a carelessly torn page. He offered it to Josmar who, not understanding, wondered if this had some connection with the suitcase. He said nothing. After all, it might be a trap.

'You received your ticket, sir? I think that this is a piece of the prospectus that came with it.'

Josmar opened the envelope that contained the ticket. With it was a prospectus, the middle page torn across. The piece the waiter handed him fitted perfectly.

'Quick, give me the suitcase. You stay here. I'll be back right away.'

The man took the suitcase, listened at the door for a moment before opening it and then disappeared silently down the corridor.

He returned in about half an hour and sat down, placing the case beside him. He seemed exhausted and there were beads of sweat all over his face and on his almost totally bald head. He poured out a cup of coffee which Josmar hadn't touched, drank it in one, and sighing deeply lay back in the armchair with his mouth open. He said:

'Put your things in the suitcase at once. There's nothing to see. The bottom's perfectly glued, but all the same it's safer to have some weight on it. And when you go out leave all your bags unlocked. There's a detective downstairs just waiting for you to leave your room. Let him have a good look.'

'I don't know whether I'll go out again this evening.'

'Better. Tourists always go out in the evening. I don't know whether it's my heart or my nerves, but I'm not the chap I used to be for this sort of job.'

He leaned towards Josmar, who had also sat down, and added in a low voice, as though it were a secret between them:

'I think I'm in a funk. A blue funk.'

'You needn't be frightened now. It's done.'

'I'm not talking about now and, as a matter of fact, I'm not scared at the moment. But most of the time . . . do you know what I mean? I was never this way in the old days. I imagine it must be the youngsters.'

'What are you talking about? What youngsters?'

'I keep asking myself what'll happen to the kids if I get pinched. Who'll feed them? Who'll pay for their schooling? I tell you, comrade, this sort of racket's all right for a bit, but . . . When I started I didn't know the whole set-up. Well, now I do. There's something nasty going to happen to me. I can feel it in my bones, no doubt about it.'

'What are you going to do then? Isn't there someone who can take over from you?'

'No, worse luck. That's what I say too. Somebody's got to do this job. But just imagine this – sometimes I wish I would get copped, just so's it was finished with once and for all. My heart's acting up peculiar. It won't be able to take this sort of thing much longer.'

He wasn't old but he seemed tired, precociously aged. In spite of everything, deep down the man was obviously nothing but a petit bourgeois. Take this exaggerated anxiety for his children. He probably had ambitions to 'make something out of them'.

'Let's forget about my troubles. Tell me a bit about what's happening up your way. Seems the Party's having fine successes up in Germany.'

Josmar talked. He described the daily increase in the Party strength, the enthusiasm of the masses who were coming more and more to realise that the Party and the Party alone offered any hope for the future.

'So we're waiting for the German October?'

'Well, not quite yet. But things are moving that way, and a lot faster than most people realise.'

'And the swastika boys? How do you explain their big successes?'

'They're nothing serious. The real enemy is social democracy with its slogans about "the lesser evil". Of course we have to fight the Nazis, and we do too, whenever we meet them, but at the moment the main

obstacle between us and victory isn't the Nazis, it's still the social-fascists.'

'Yes, I see,' the man answered. He seemed calmer and apparently rested. 'You're lucky, you people. You can fight in the open. Down here we're like moles. Sometimes I wonder how we can be sure we're headed the right way, living the way we do. But once you send up the balloon, up there in your country, we'll be right with you, and no police terror will stop us. You see, you're our only hope.'

'I don't think you've quite got the point, or else you've expressed yourself badly. One must . . .'

'Yes, yes, I know. You're absolutely right. One must fight with one's weapons, whatever weapons one has to hand. Well, I must be getting along now. Look after yourself and be careful!'

He took the tray, opened the door to its full width and said:

'Yes, sir, if you wish it breakfast can be served in your room. Thank you, sir.'

He bowed and was gone.

4

The woman had jumped up with a start. She stood now in the centre of the room. She went over to the basin and began to dress hurriedly in an absentminded sort of way.

Josmar watched her movements. She straightened her stockings, which she had not taken off, and fixed them to her garters, saying as she did so:

'Hurry up and get dressed. You can't stay there. The boss won't like your being so long.'

They had to go through the café. The invisible accordionist was still playing. For a moment Josmar couldn't remember where the music came from. He stopped to listen. The woman switched on the lights and there he was, holding the instrument in his arms as though it were a baby.'

'Go away,' said the woman to Josmar: 'He can't see, but all the same he doesn't like being stared at. He can sense it.'

The man raised his sightless eyes and Josmar had the sensation that he was being scrutinised.

The woman went up to the musician and touched his arm. He stopped playing, and asked her:

'Has he gone, Kaya, the Prussian?'

'Yes.'

'Tell me what he was like.'

'She described Josmar.'

'He was handsome then, your Prussian. And you'll never see him again? Tell me, Kaya.'

'No, Joso, never again.'

'Let's go home, quickly.'

He got up.

Josmar slipped out through the open door.

'No,' he thought, 'that's not the sort of pity or lack of pity that Vasso was talking about.' He hurried, as though he were running away from someone.

CHAPTER III

I

THE road led through a little wood. After the harsh sunshine the shadows were as refreshing as a cold drink. The bright blue sea glittered between the trunks of the trees; it was absolutely calm, motionless, as though it too were exhausted by the searing heat.

'It's all so gay and peaceful round here, it's hard to believe this country's being terrorised,' said Josmar.

'It's easy to ignore the terror. It's hidden by the indifference of the overwhelming majority of the people.' The comrade at Josmar's side was a rather small, thin man, whose face when he was gay seemed young, and when he was serious seemed ageless.

'There's no such thing as true indifference,' said Josmar. He had really no wish to discuss the point, but he felt slightly annoyed by the other man's dogmatic manner of speaking.

'On the contrary indifference is everywhere. When you pass in history from the study of action to the study of conditions you always come up against this blank indifference. That's always been the solid basis of power and the sure protection of every dominant group. It's only on the very rare occasions when the indifferent mass of humanity gets into motion that the structure of power is shaken to pieces.'

'You mean to say that the people who don't care are really those who make history?' Josmar asked ironically.

'No, but they are responsible for the slow rhythm of history. They're the ones who put a premature stop to any revolutionary movement. They apply the brake. You see, they get tired. Indifference is as

appalling and as murderous in its effects as the 'most brutal violence.'

'You're Austrian, and you seem as much at home here as if you were in your own country. Why is that?' Josmar wanted to change the subject.

'I came here originally for two or three months, on a mission not unlike yours. I was collecting information about an ancient sort of South Slav village-community, called Zayednica. The movement was already to all intents and purposes illegal. That's when I first met Vasso.'

'I saw him before leaving Berlin. He was at the final, decisive meeting. Soennecke was in the chair.'

'So Soennecke lets himself be used for that sort of thing too?'

'What do you mean?' asked Josmar with distrust.

'In the first place that meeting wasn't decisive, as you put it. The decisions had already been made in Moscow, by Russians and nobody but Russians, and all the rest was theatre; the actors, dressed up to play themselves, came on the stage and said the lines they'd learned by heart. In the second place Soennecke knows better than anyone else that the slogan "class against class" is bad, even in a country like Germany, and he knows as well as Vasso does that here, with an eighty per cent rural population, it's sheer lunacy. In the third place it's because Soennecke knows just that that he's on the skids. In the fourth place it's because Vasso knows it that he's been eliminated. In the fifth place, so as to get rid of the pair of them conveniently, Soennecke's the man who's been told to give Vasso the push. That's my answer, each point neatly numbered, so that you won't have any trouble when you sit down to write your "report" about me.'

'I don't even know your name,' said Josmar.

'Denis Faber. My friends call me Doino. Have you noted the various points I made, and do you understand now what I was saying about indifference?'

'No. I don't see the connection,' said Josmar.

The bay lay spread out beneath their feet. A boat with brilliantly white sails crossed in front of the tiny islands. Faber dressed entirely in white from top to top, fitted well into the landscape. 'He sees nothing of all this,' thought Josmar; 'he's too busy winning me over to Vasso's point of view. But friendship must count for nothing.'

'The bourgeois state has organised that indifference to perfection. Indeed, it's the foundation of their society. Millions of soldiers proved in the late war that men will fight bravely and die heroically in a

complete indifference to the reasons for which they fight and die. Both sides had the same motto: *Theirs not to reason why.*'

'Forgive me, Faber, but I still don't see what you're getting at. In any case the Party isn't an organisation of indifferent people. Even our worst enemies have never accused us of that.'

'Wait a minute, Goeben. The armies let loose against one another at Verdun or on the Somme were caught in a paroxysm comparable to that of a man running amok, weren't they? But what lies behind that? Primarily obedience to orders. Naturally with fear thrown in.'

'We communists,' we're revolutionaries,' said Josmar insistently. 'We don't believe anyone has the right to be indifferent. We've put millions of men in motion, millions. They can't stop now, and now it's impossible for the world ever to sink back into indifference again. That's the truth. Everything else is so much hot air.'

'That's only half the truth. We've put millions of men in motion against us, too. Most of the workers in Germany who aren't unemployed belong to unions from which we're barred. We call them social-fascists and make them hate us even more. At this moment Hitler is organising the enormous masses of the petit bourgeois both in the town and the country, a large army of indifferent men who will crush us, while we talk about "class against class" and yet we can't even organise a single important strike. No man like Soennecke, no real workers' leader, could ever have thought up such a slogan and such a policy. It was imposed on us from outside and we obeyed. The meeting of which you spoke made no decisions. The men with the names of the seasons were anxious to obey because only the obedient continue to be powerful in the Party. Do you realise what it means when a man of the calibre of Vasso Militch is pushed on one side?'

'Individuals are unimportant.'

'In a real revolutionary movement individuals count, every man counts, even if there are tens of thousands of them. But in an army the individual is nothing. Among revolutionaries a man can find his true personality, among soldiers he must lose it, must become alienated from himself. Vasso found men and made them, the people with the names of seasons want those men to become estranged from themselves once again. It's a period of obedience that's starting.'

Josmar made no attempt to answer this. What Faber was saying was no concern of his. If Vasso wouldn't follow the Party line, then he was no longer of any use to the Party. Everything else was rubbish. It's impossible for one man to know better than the Party.

In order finally to get Faber off the subject, he asked:

'Can you tell me something about the two comrades we're going to meet?'

'There's Karel, the technician. When you think of him in the future you'll remember an unusually large man. He's not as big as he seems, it's just that he always takes up more room than his body actually needs. On the other hand nobody can disappear quite as fast as Karel. It's impossible to find him, but he can always find you. He's a bold fellow. He's only afraid of men whose weak points he hasn't yet discovered. Which doesn't last long, since he's damn quick at finding other people's weak points, particularly if they're well hidden. In that respect he's really intelligent, for the rest he's just cunning. He's only a traitor through faithfulness.'

'Faithfulness?' Josmar was astonished.

'Yes, selective faithfulness. Whenever the age, and not the man, is ripe for a big decision, this curious faithfulness comes into action. For example, Karel is truly fond of me. He remembers and appreciates almost everything I've ever said to him. If ever he does me harm, it will certainly be because of faithfulness to orders. They tortured him abominably for weeks in order to get him to compromise Vasso. He said nothing and saved his friend's life. Yet at tomorrow's meeting he'll betray Vasso. He'll side against him on every issue.'

'Oh, I see, faithfulness to the Party,' interjected Josmar.

'No one knows the opinion of Party members, no one even bothers to ask them. The next issue of *The Proletarian* tells them what their opinions are. But enough of that. Let's go on to Andrei, the other comrade. In a few years' time he'll be the best man we have, next to Vasso. He can drag people out of indifference the way one stops a man from feeling humiliated by making him believe that he has pulled himself out of humiliation.'

'How old is he?'

'Young, hardly twenty-five, but he started young. He ran away from home at sixteen.'

'Why?'

'Because he was ashamed of his father, a drunkard who eventually drowned himself in a duck pond. You see, Goeben, there's no telling what'll make a man become a revolutionary. Andrei could have run away because of poverty or exploitation. He, a docker's son, could have started as a member of the Communist Youth Organisation, waving a red flag and all that. In fact, he escaped as a cabin boy on a wretched Greek tramp.'

'I see. And on the boat he came to recognise the real enemy of his class.'

'Not a bit of it. On this tub it was the sailors who were his persecutors. He couldn't speak their language and they gave him hell. He'd have hanged himself only he was afraid they'd treat him worse if he muffed it.... He was saved by an old anarchist sea dog. I met the chap a couple of years back. His ship was in port a few days and Andrei introduced us. We had violent arguments with him, he's a ferocious anti-communist, old Augusto. He refuses to rely on anyone but himself. He writes pamphlets, all by hand, and passes them out in every port he goes to. The police lock him up as soon as they set eyes on him and let him go just before his ship sails. Whenever he can he gets drunk and makes speeches. Naturally nobody takes his speeches seriously except him. He loves everybody and he hasn't a friend in the world except, of course, Andrei.'

'What do you mean? Surely Andrei can't take him seriously?'

'He has distinction, a sort of nobility, don't you see that? All decent proletarians hanker after something a little nobler, a little deeper, a little more moving, than the plain desire to have a full belly every day. They suspect, confusedly perhaps, that man will only achieve dignity when there are no limits set to his nobility.'

'It's funny. You and Vasso are always saying things that, properly speaking, are meaningless. No proletarian would have any idea what you were talking about.'

'Andrei is a proletarian and he understands perfectly. He's a true disciple of Augusto and Vasso. Augusto persuaded him to go back home and look after his mother. Vasso discovered him, adopted him and made a man of him. It's Vasso who taught him how to talk to working men, how to organise a strike, how to recruit sympathisers. And, most important of all, how to recognise facts, even facts that don't fit in with the resolutions and estimates of the Party line.'

'The facts always fit the Party line,' Josmar objected.

'There is no "always". May God punish the believers who go to the Party and try to make a church out of it.'

'I'm an atheist myself, but you and Vasso are always talking about religion.'

'Because we know history, because we're absolutely free of any need to believe and of any yearning after an absolute. We know that it's easier for the most hardened sceptic to invent a new God than it is to educate a new man. The case of Pascal is perplexing, even after three centuries.'

'Naturally the case of Pascal is perplexing, but apart from *that* we haven't got any worries.'

It was said with a laugh and Josmar, turning, saw in front of him a large red face.

Doino introduced Karel. At that moment Andrei joined them.

Karel said:

'I'm not the man to say how dangerous the late Monsieur Pascal was, but there's one thing I can tell you, Doino, and that is that they've got their nets out and if we're not bloody careful we're going to be caught like so many little fish. We'll have to hold our meeting tonight.'

During the short walk to the hut Josmar had difficulty in following the conversation between the other three. All the arrangements had to be scrapped and new ones made so that the meeting of the committee could be held a day early. Nine of the members of this committee were available. The other five would arrive too late and the meeting would have to be held without them. It was a pity, but in view of the imminent danger there was nothing else to do.

'Who are the five?' asked Andrei.

Karel told him and, since no one spoke, he hastened to add:

'I know what you're thinking, Andrei, but really it's pure bad luck that they happen to be just the five you were relying on.'

Karel had taken off his shirt, which he hung round his neck like a scarf. Mosquitoes settled on his back and chest, but he seemed not to feel their stings. He said again:

'It's really just the luck of the game. You do believe me, don't you?'

'Yes, but I don't like luck. It frightens me. It works too often for the man with power or the man about to get it.'

Even though Andrei was no smaller than Karel he gave the impression of a boy in contrast to the other's mature certainty and consciousness of strength.

Everything about Karel was too heavy, too full: his lips, his nose, his bulging forehead, his arms, his chest. Andrei's face had a sort of beauty, marred by the severity of his expression: deep-set, over-serious, brooding eyes, too straight a forehead, a very narrow-bridged nose, a pointed chin.

'I'll take full responsibility,' said Karel. 'The meeting must take place today.'

They agreed on the steps to be taken. Andrei and Doino soon left the hut to make the necessary arrangements. Karel was too well known in the neighbourhood to dare go out by day; Josmar stayed with him.

'I imagine Doino didn't only talk to you about Pascal. Did he tell you I'd betrayed Vasso?'

'He didn't put it quite like that.'

'Naturally not. It'd have been too simple for him. I expect he began with a brief biographical sketch of Alexander the Great's physician and then went on . . .'

Josmar interrupted him with a smile:

'No, he didn't talk about physicians, he talked about indifference.'

'Did he now? And then he went on to mention our lack of faithfulness? Very interesting! It's not a laughing matter, Goeben. I take that man very seriously indeed. He criticises the Party, he never agrees with the Party line, but when it comes to action he obeys and is extremely efficient. Intellectuals who only want to sit and yap can be useful too, but there's never any need to take them seriously. But those who only talk when they are not actually under fire and who think in terms of action all the time, they can become dangerous. And if a man is capable of turning dangerous one must do one of two things: liquidate him or respect him.'

2

The meeting had already been going on for an hour and a half. Karel, who was in the chair, had read aloud all the documents that Josmar had brought with him. The delegates listened attentively. They realised that one of their number, Winter, had assumed an ascendancy over the others. This big, fat man, with remarkably slow gestures, had taken Vasso's place. They all waited for him to speak but he said nothing. He had a pile of almonds on the table before him, and he munched them continually. A curious phenomenon was that the pile didn't seem to grow any smaller. Josmar noticed this and decided he'd ask Winter after the meeting how it was done.

Karel was saying:

'I see no point in discussing those documents. It's all quite clear, and anyhow the time for divergence of opinions is past. So I'll read you the resolution which this committee will address to the country.'

'No, no. That's not the way at all. We can't close the Slipit business like that.'

Josmar turned towards the man who had spoken. He sat at the far end of the table, a pale, thin man. His mouth was open as though he were about to shout something, but no sound came from him. He banged his fist on the table, a gesture of impotent anger.

'Speak, Voyko Brankovic,' said Winter. 'Speak calmly. You're among friends now. But don't forget this. You've been in prison for two years, and you may have missed some things which you ought to know about before you can form a just opinion. And remember this, Voyko. We're not dealing with an individual, it's a matter of what Slipic stands for, what's behind him. Now what do you want to say, Voyko?'

Voyko explained that he had himself been a member of the Party tribunal which had met inside the prison only two months ago and which had ordered Slipic's expulsion from the Party. They had examined his case in detail. He had long been in solitary confinement and had completely misunderstood the literature that the comrades had slipped him. He was a pigheaded fellow and thanks to his pig-headedness had behaved superbly during the interrogation and before the court; on the other hand he was intellectually so confused that all attempts by the comrades to get him back on the right track had failed. So here he was, expelled from the Party, absolutely alone, and no one would even speak to him. His attitude towards the Party was false and inclined to be hostile, which was why they had kicked him out. But to suggest that he was a police spy or an informer was not only fantastically stupid but also dishonest and therefore anti-communist. Slipic still had three years to do. Perhaps in his absolute solitude he would find the way back. It was wicked to slander him in this way, for he had been a most valuable comrade. His view that the Party should not have accepted defeat without a struggle, some remarks he had made about the defeat itself, and his general attitude towards the situation in China, those were mistakes, obviously, but the idea that he had ever worked in any way for the police, that, no!

Voyko repeated himself and he seemed to notice that the others were beginning to be bored by his long-windedness. He tried to find some way to end, but could not, and began again, going into details, incidents that were meant to show Slipic in a favourable light or to elicit sympathy for him.

At last Karel interrupted:

'Good, we know your point of view. I don't see what you're so excited about. After all you expelled him yourself. What are you after now then? He's not an informer, you say. How do you know? You've been in prison, so how can you tell what's been found out about him outside? What about his past life? Let me tell you, Voyko, you're getting on to slippery ground. Let me remind you of something else: Trotsky. Who'd have thought a few years ago that Trotsky would

have turned out what we now know him to be? Nowadays everyone knows that he is and always was an enemy of the Party.'

'What's Trotsky got to do with it? I'm talking about Slipic, a comrade I've known for years and years, a man whose character I know intimately and respect. That man never worked for the police, he's not that sort, and never could be.'

A furious altercation followed between Karel and Voyko. The others listened without comment.

To finish it Karel, now absolutely calm, declared:

'Your nerves have gone. Which is not to be wondered at after what you've been through yourself. We'll think about your case later, for myself I feel a month or two's rest before you go back to work wouldn't do you any harm. As for Slipic we're all, except you, fully in agreement with the decision taken by the comrades of the politburo. Has anyone else anything to say on the subject?'

Voyko looked at the others. No one spoke. He passed his hand several times over his face. He was perspiring heavily. He chewed at his finger-nails.

Then Winter spoke:

'I have warned Comrade Brankovic, but he doesn't seem to have understood. This is something that must be made clear to all comrades, so let me explain in detail what our point of view is. Let us suppose that Slipic is not, in fact, an agent of the police. So far so good. He's been expelled from the Party. Therefore he'll come out of prison lonely, bitter and naturally he'll attack the Party. He'll be able to make capital out of all he's suffered for the cause, torture during interrogation, five years' solitary, and so on. He'll be listened to all the more carefully since he'll enjoy a certain prestige because of how he fought and suffered. And logically, just because of that suffering, he'll tend more and more away from us, more and more towards the enemy. And he'll make a dangerous enemy. But we can stymie him now and stop him for ever from being a danger to us. If, from today on, we spread the story that he was an informer, and if we go on saying that loudly enough for three years, by the time he comes out of jail no one will want to have anything to do with him. He will, in fact, be more isolated than he is at present in his cell. It's clearly a pity that we have to do this, but there's no choice. It's as clear as day. Anyone disagree?'

'I do,' said Andrei. 'I disagree.' If error is a crime, then all of us here are criminals, all the heads of the Party all over the world are criminals. I've never accused you, Winter, of being a criminal or an informer but how many mistakes have you made in the past? How many actions

have you ordered that resulted in loss and failure? And now you're trying to put the blame on Vasso Militch for everything that went wrong in the past. And anyhow, why shouldn't Slipic talk about our defeat and the ghastly failure of our policy in China?

'That's got nothing to do with the subject,' said Karel.

'Truth has to do with all our subjects, because truth is the mainspring of any revolutionary party,' replied Andrei.

'You know what a high opinion I have of you, Andrei Bocek,' said Winter. 'That's why we've decided to send you abroad immediately. There you can study, and when you've learned a little more you'll understand why what you've just said is unmitigated rubbish. You haven't even understood the principle of bolshevisation, a principle, incidentally, more important here than in any other Party of the Comintern. And now we must put this matter to the vote.' I'll be interested to see which way you vote.'

'I shall vote the way my conscience dictates.'

'And if your conscience conflicts with the Party line? Which way do you vote then?'

'A stupid question and badly put,' cried Andrei hotly.

'But that's exactly the form in which the Party puts it. Karel, let's get on with the voting.'

Andrei stood up suddenly, as though about to walk out, but remained, motionless and very pale, with both his hands resting on the table.

'Bocek, everyone has raised his hand, even Brankovic. It'd be a pity if you didn't do so too. Remember, there shall be no more opposition and there can be no more opposition inside the Party. Do you want to become an enemy?'

Winter walked over to Andrei, took his right hand from the table and raised it in the air. Andrei did not let it fall. He turned his head away and said:

'This is the first time since I joined the movement that I have done something against my conscience. It's the first time since leaving home that I've given in to something I didn't approve. I shall blame myself for this as long as I live.'

'Look here, Andrei, life is long and you'll have better and more intelligent things to do,' said Winter, taking him by both shoulders as though he were going to embrace him.

Andrei turned slowly away. He avoided looking at Winter as he said:

'At the moment I would wish that my life might be very short.'

The meeting went on until long after midnight.

CHAPTER IV

I

At last Andrei saw the harbour, down there below him. There were three fishing-boats, big rowing-boats really, tied up to the little jetty. If he couldn't persuade one of the boatmen to take him across or even if it took a long time to do so he was lost. He left the forest track and was soon threading his way through the maze of back streets. No running, it would look suspicious. But every minute counted. He ran.

'Take me just over to the coast. I've got to get out of here in a hurry.'

The man looked at him a long time before answering:

'The motor boat goes in fifteen minutes. That'll get you across much quicker than I could.'

'I know, but I don't want to go to the port. I want to land right over there on the opposite shore.'

Andrei pointed across the water. He noticed that his hand trembled and so he let it fall to his side.

'I've got a large family. If the police take me, they'll be the ones who'll suffer.'

'So the fisherman understood, perhaps he even knew who Andrei was. The boatmen had probably already heard that the police were out after him.

'Do you know who I am?' Andrei asked.

'Yes. I know you. What harm have I ever done you? Why do you come to me? Leave me alone, leave me alone, I say.'

Time was passing. The fishermen in the other boats had disappeared. They couldn't be far away, since they'd been there when Andrei had first spoken to this one. He noticed that their boats were chained and padlocked.

'If you don't take me to the other side right away they'll catch me and kill me. Everybody on this island, everybody in the country will know what you did: how you could have saved my life but handed me over instead.'

Andrei jumped into the boat and loosened the mooring chain. Then he lay down in the bottom, covering himself with the nets.

'Oh God, what have I done to deserve this. I'm saving your life and you, you're murdering me.'

The man cast off and started the outboard motor. They made a good speed. The fisherman kept looking back over his shoulder but said nothing. As they neared the mainland he spoke:

'It's all so stupid. You've ruined me and what good will it do you? You won't escape from the police, no one can. They have the right to commit evil when they wish and, therefore, the likes of us are just dirt beneath their feet. Oh God, why did it have to be me that you came to?'

Since Andrei said nothing, he went on:

'All my life I've had bad luck. If a tile wants to fall off a roof, it waits until I am passing below, it is on my head that it will fall, that's what my mother always said.'

As Andrei felt the boat bump against the shore he half rose, throwing back the nets. There was no one about and he jumped on land.

'I haven't much money, but we'll share it.'

The fisherman wouldn't accept anything.

'I didn't do it for money. I did it because I am a fool. You pay a fool by beating him with a stick.'

'Enough of that sort of thing. It'll be our turn soon. Then you can hunt the police as though they were rabbits and kill them as if they were rats.'

'We fishermen, all we want is to fish and to go on living. We don't want to hurt anybody or kill anybody. So run along hunted rabbit and stay away from me. Our life's hard enough without you people making it harder. Good luck to you, and God help you.'

Andrei plunged into the bushes and headed for the forest, going fast. As soon as he saw the road he crouched down, for he must not be seen by anyone. He reckoned he had half an hour's start on them. In an hour and a half he should be able to get through the wood and down to the little port. There he knew of a safe hiding-place with comrades he could absolutely trust. Then tonight he'd make his way to the big port. Once there he could find out the best way to leave the country, since that was what the Party had ordered. He was still conscious of danger, but as he grew less frightened he began to feel tired again. He had not slept all night. He had just gone to bed, was in fact just closing his eyes, when he had heard the footsteps. There were a lot of them, too many for silence as they moved up in a semi-circle to trap him. They had come in force this time; they wanted to make sure of their prey. Which was why their prey had been able to escape.

He grew increasingly aware of his exhaustion. It was still early but already the south wind was beginning to warm the air. Andrei had made up his mind not to rest at all until he was safely with his friends. All the same, he thought, he could afford to sit down for five minutes. But to sit was dangerous, he might be seen if there were anyone about. So he lay on his stomach resting on his elbows. He listened. Not a sound. Not even a bird sang.

When Andrei awoke, after having slept the morning through, he was very frightened. They could easily have caught him; for a man on the run sleep is the most treacherous danger. All the same he felt rested, which was to the good, but hungry and thirsty, which was bad. He got up and shook himself. Then he began walking again.

He reached the edge of the forest sooner than he expected. He had made a mistake. The woods did not reach as far as the little port. There was the sea in front of him again. To get to the port he'd either have to find a boat or else walk along the main road. This road ran along the shore, quite open and visible from all sides. There was a lot of traffic on it, peasant women on their way back from market, peasants' carts loaded with fruit headed for the harbour. Andrei was only wearing a shirt and trousers, but they were city clothes all the same. He couldn't mix with the peasants without becoming conspicuous right away.

It was dangerous to leave the forest, but it was probably even more dangerous to stay there. At this moment they were doubtless fetching reinforcements, and they'd be sure to have dogs. So he'd better get out at once, head up through the woods into the mountains, go over the top and come down the other side so as to end up near the big port.

He set off at a brisk pace. He felt very hungry now, but not unbearably so. He picked berries as he went along. They quenched his thirst.

This time when he left the woods the sun was shining fiercely and the rocks were scorching to the touch. Andrei reckoned it must be about noon. He was climbing all the time, it was absolutely open and he was easily visible, particularly from the chapel that stood on the crown of the hill. But there was still no sound to be heard save his own footsteps.

When he reached the chapel he got his bearings again. He now stood between two villages, one of which he recognised as Telec, so he must, quite involuntarily, have come to a place quite near where Liuba lived, since she was behind Telec towards the sea. Karel had warned him to keep away from that part of the world and specifically urged him to

leave the country without saying goodbye 'to any member of the opposite sex'. Once he was abroad he could always get his girl to join him.

The chapel cast a welcome shade. The climb in the fierce sunshine had exhausted Andrei again and he sat down, leaning against its wall. His shirt was wringing wet, so he took it off and his shoes too. He looked at the countryside spread out below him, poor, stony land. From above it seemed to be covered with tiny stone houses without roofs. In fact, it was cut up into very small market-gardens. The ground had had to be cleared of stones and these formed the walls, as high as a man. They separated the gardens and also provided a certain shelter against high wind as well as protection from goats. Once this land was all forest. Then the Venetians had come and cut down all the trees. The soil had eroded, leaving this stone residue behind. The power of Venice had long disappeared, but here the backs of the peasants, bent by pain and toil, still paid the price of her former splendours.

Even though he knew that there was no reason for it, Andrei felt safe up by the chapel, and he didn't want to fight against this pleasurable sensation. They had certainly arrested the fisherman by now, so they would know where he had landed. They must have combed the woods for him, and presumably their spies were already busy looking for him in the little port. They would have questioned the peasant women on the roads, the boatbuilders on the edge of the village, the fishermen and dockworkers in the port, the waiters of both the cafés. They would have talked to the children of comrades and of 'suspects', asking them if the visiting uncle had brought them a nice present, had he given them an ice-cream or a lovely slice of melon? At the moment the village would be deserted, everyone having taken shelter from the sun. But Andrei's friends would know that one of their people was wanted, they might even have guessed who it was. They'd send someone to the town for news and to find out if there was anything they could do.

Meanwhile the news of his escape from the police will have reached the town. And Slavko – as everyone calls the notorious Commissioner of the Political Police – will be at the very climax of his fit of rage. He has already cuffed one or two of his subordinates. He has drunk until his eyes are running over. Men who don't know him would assume him to be incapable of action of any sort. In fact he is working out a new plan. He has already sent out patrols of his men, disguised as hawkers perhaps. In two or three hours they'll be arriving in the various villages where, despite the heat, they will immediately set

about combing the markets, the workers' homes, the cottages, the very goat-sheds, spying, listening, peeping.

Then Slavko himself will arrive to visit his dear villagers, an outing in the country with a few of his friends. He'll pinch the matron's bottoms, accidentally run his hand over the breasts of the young women, greet the girls with an exaggerated amiability. Finally, when a friendly atmosphere has been established, then Slavko will strike.

No. Andrei had no reason at all to feel safe. However, since seeing Telec, he knew the sense of his coming up here. He wouldn't have to leave the country without seeing Liuba. He could wait where he was since he had undoubtedly a few hours lead on his pursuers, and then, using the stone walls as cover, make his way by a roundabout route to the foreign painter's house. Liuba would notice the light in the attic window, since it was her job to look after the house when the owner was away. She'd bring him food and they'd have an hour together. Then, in the foreigner's clothes, he'd leave the area and the country. Slavko would hear about it, but too late. Karel would be annoyed. It didn't matter.

2

Slavko didn't get to his office until after three. He pretended not to know that Andrei had escaped the trap set and gave orders that he be brought to him at once. This time he didn't immediately burst into a tantrum. He didn't strike any of his assistants, contenting himself with jabbing them in the ribs instead. He sent out his few people variously disguised as hawkers, unemployed labourers or travelling cobblers. But he did it all calmly with far less shouting than was customary. Then he disappeared for two hours. When he came back he summoned his small staff, a collection of comparatively young men, all of whom wore straw hats with blue ribbons. He addressed them as 'his dear paladins, his dear, dirty paladins'. He also sent for the young gentleman recently arrived from the capital, come, as they put it, to 'serve an apprenticeship'. Slavko, however, believed that the young gentleman had been sent to spy on him and to arrange for his fall at the appropriate moment.

'Any news? Any reports of the fellow's movements?'

One of the young men answered:

'Not yet. They bagged one but he turned out to be nothing but a thief suspected of murder.'

'Naturally. They know how to nab thieves all right. So they should,

being thieves themselves. Before they learn how to catch communists I suppose they'll have to join the Party.'

This was an old joke of Slavko's. His paladins, as always, laughed dutifully. Only the 'young gentleman' remained unamused.

'How would you set about catching him, Dr Maritch?' Slavko asked, using the polite form of address. He had decided that before the day was out he would speak to Maritch in the familiarly impertinent second person singular.

Maritch replied carefully:

'A novice like me, Mr Commissioner, hardly dare make any suggestions to a man of your experience. I'm sure you'll arrest him. The government have good reasons for the trust they place in you.'

'Pity I don't seem drunk,' thought Slavko. 'Otherwise I could tell him what I think of him now: treat him like the pain in the arse he is; order him to put in his next report that I'm grateful for the government's trust, but as it happens I don't trust the government. What the hell! But it'll keep.'

'And now let's get going my little toadies, and you too, young sir. When I say toadies, I am referring, as I always do, to everyone. Come on.'

The open carriage drove slowly through the dock area. The Commissioner wanted the whole town to know that Slavko himself was setting off for the chase. He leaned back, enormous, bloated, his hat balanced on his huge belly. He drove through this part of the town in order to spread the alarm among Andrei's friends. They would probably send a warning message to the fugitive. The message would be of little value to the hunted man: the track of the messenger might prove invaluable to his hunters. This time, though, Slavko didn't really need that particular sort of clue. He knew the way the man would take better than any messenger. The bird had flown and for the moment was flapping its wings somewhere out of sight. But the bird knew of a cosy little nest where he was bound to end up. All Slavko had to do was to find the nest and the bird would come to him.

They arrived in a quiet village. The peasants were all eating their evening meal in their homes. In the inn they found only one of the hawkers. They ordered a good dinner. Slavko was amiability itself, drinking his wine straight out of the green earthenware jug in which it was served, chatting with the landlord and his daughter-in-law who soon joined them.

It did a man good, he was saying, to get away from town and one's office from time to time, to forget everything for an evening, eat good

country food, sing a few songs, perhaps even dance a *kolو*. For himself, he'd had a bellyful of desk sitting. No one would guess he was still only forty, but so far as dancing went he could do it as well as any man half his age. And he lifted his jug and drank the young woman's health.

'This is a poor and simple village,' the landlord was saying hesitantly.

'There's no reason your village should be poor,' the Commissioner replied. 'You should do something to attract people here. Foreigners would come, take rooms, buy food and drink, all well paid you understand. Everybody would make money then. But the trouble is no one's ever heard of your pretty village. In fact, so far as the outer world is concerned, it just doesn't exist.'

But the daughter-in-law told him that a foreigner had come that way and had actually bought a cottage, not exactly in the village, but nearby. He spent two or three months there each year. He was a painter, he'd even painted her eldest daughter, 'for nothing, simply because he liked "the girl's looks". And that was all there was to the painter. Slavko questioned her about her children. It was a friendly conversation. He said he would like to see the portrait, but unfortunately the painter, who was away at the time, had kept it. A pity. It might be in his cottage, but there was no way of getting in, since he closed it up when he wasn't there. She excused herself; she had to help her mother-in-law in the kitchen.

A boy came in to buy a box of matches and a packet of cigarette papers. Slavko offered him a glass of *raki*, and joked with him about the village girls and his sweetheart. Others who must have been watching through the open door, joined them. Slavko was friendly with them all, slapping them on the back, asking them if they played the accordion, if their girl was pretty, if the foreign painter had done their portrait. The boys started by being shy and reserved, but were soon all talking at once. The Commissioner kept repeating, more and more loudly:

'Bring some drinks, landlord, it's all on me. Drink up the good liquor. God doesn't want the brothers to be thirsty. It's all on me.'

They grew more and more boisterous and talkative. The paladins mingled among them, disappeared, came back. The inn didn't empty until close on midnight.

The paladins had gone too. Slavko had long sent the landlord and his family to bed. Now Maritch asked him:

'And now what? Where do we go from here? Do you really know where this Andrei Bocek is hiding?'

'Too many questions at once. But put this in your report.' He was

speaking in the second person singular. 'Say that the Commissioner Miroslav Hrvatic got so drunk that he caused a scandal in the whole province, that he insulted the son of the future minister Maritch, and that he says "shit" to the whole Government. There's my answer to your questions. And now, you pain in the arse, get up. I want to sleep on that bench. See no one wakes me. And fan me to keep the flies away. That's all.'

Maritch got up slowly. He was tall, slim and broad-shouldered. His neck was perhaps a shade too long, but his head was finely carved. He was a handsome man, and he knew it. As he walked round the table to where the Commissioner was standing he kept his hands in his pockets. When he reached him he slowly took out his left hand and placed it against Slavko's right cheek. Then, quickly pulling out his right hand, he gave him three hard slaps across the face. He paused between slaps in order to get a new grip on Slavko's right cheek.

'The third one was for calling me a pain in the arse and for using an impudent mode of address. The first two were an old debt. Now you lie down and go to sleep. I'm going to wash my hands.'

Slavko was still standing up. He hadn't moved for a while. He hadn't even touched his cheek, which was beginning to swell up. Then he lay down quietly.

Maritch was looking for a fountain. He was well aware that his life was in danger, and that he might not even live through the night. Like many others he knew roughly the history of Miroslav Hrvatic, of Slavko the national figure, of Slavko for short, a history that had followed a course which was tortuous but yet consistent.

The Police Commissioner was the only son of a country school-teacher, who had sent him to the town to complete his studies. There he had joined a students' secret society and had become involved in an attempt to assassinate the Hungarian governor. It was not a serious attempt, though the authorities tended to take it seriously. In any case, when it failed Slavko slipped off to Serbia for a while. In due course he returned to study law, perhaps eventually to become a judge as his father hoped. After the Sarajevo incident he was one of the many people arrested, and was, it was rumoured at the time, maltreated. A few days after his imprisonment almost all his friends were arrested. There was no doubt whatever he had talked. A little later he was set free. Called up into the army, he was sent to a 'Detachment for the Re-establishment of Order in the Occupied Enemy Territories', units which were popularly known as 'Hanging Squads'. Their business had to be transacted with scrupulous legality, according to orders laid down

by the Imperial and Royal Army. No one was hanged without trial. Here Slavko came in useful as a Judge Advocate. If boys of fourteen or fifteen were to be hanged, Slavko was the one to declare that they had reached the legal age at which they could undergo capital punishment. Thus everything was in order. Where the 'Squad' had passed the trees bore a grim fruit, transformed into avenues of gallows. The Serbian people who had so recently sheltered the exiled Austro-Croat, Miroslav Hrvatic, and had given him all assistance in their power, came to call these sinister avenues 'Slavko Streets'.

In 1916 Hrvatic, Seconded to the State Police, was sent to the capital of his country. When the end came he went into hiding, but he realised that his hiding-place was probably known. They would obviously tear him limb from limb as he so richly deserved. And already the Serbian Army was entering the town. He placed the barrel of his revolver in his mouth, but he lacked the courage to pull the trigger. He drank until he passed out. Let them find him asleep and kill him while he was unconscious.

He was amazed to awake and find that they had not come. The city was still noisily celebrating its liberation. Every now and then a shot would ring out. He expected them to come at any moment, and still he hadn't the courage to finish himself off. He thought of flight, but he was too well known and anyhow it was too late. He didn't even dare set foot outside his hiding-place. He began to think that if the Serbs didn't kill him hunger would.

At last they came. Only two of them, in mufti, colleagues from the Belgrade Police. Of course they recognised him instantly. Their pockets were stuffed with his photograph, taken from every conceivable angle.

'Colleague Hrvatic, is it not? Or do you prefer to be called just Slavko? Dear little Slavko, nice kind Slavko, ha ha ha! In Slavko Street all the trees have branches that bend down, don't they? Dear Slavko loves to decorate his trees with Serbs, doesn't he? Serbian men, Serbian children, Montenegrin women. Slavko, tree decorator, I shit in the face of your sunshine, I shit in the face of your God, your Emperor of Austria, your King of Hungary.'

They went on with such pleasantries for a little while, giving him a blow from time to time, but nothing really painful. Then they took him off, by back streets, to a place of safety. A well-organised state needs a police force. Slavko had better be forgotten for a while, long enough for the grass to grow over his infamous past. He was given a new name and a job in the Ministry of the Interior. He was kept well

out of the limelight. The police archives had first to be reconstructed, and then . . .

And then there was always the job of restoring law and order in the country. Slavko re-emerged from the shadows as a staunch supporter of the Karageorgevitch dynasty. A good Yugoslav in the fight against the eternally troublesome Croats, he was the most effective man in organising the anti-communist campaign.

'Can he really be asleep?' Maritch wondered. Leaning over Slavko he felt his pockets. Apparently he carried no revolver. That was something. All the same Maritch knew that this killer had never killed anyone himself; he would use his paladins to dispose of anyone he felt to be in his way.

Maritch went out again into the cloudless, moonlit night, a shimmering tapestry of blue and silver. He was sadly astonished that such a night should be heavy with danger. He was thinking solely about himself, and had forgotten that on this beautiful night he was hunting Andrei Bocek.

3

Andrei woke up with a start. Was that a noise of some sort? He listened. Nothing. He was safe here in this isolated, empty house, so far from the village, so far even from any road. It must have been the moon shining through the mosquito netting that had awakened him. Not a sound. Liuba was sleeping peacefully. To hear her breathing he had to lean over and put his ear close to her mouth. As he did so she awoke. She didn't open her eyes.

'It's you, Andrei?'

He kissed her.

'You won't go and leave me all alone, will you, Andrei? You promised. That's why I'm with you. No me without you, no you without me. You promised.'

'I promised. But they're after me.'

She put her arms round him and pulled him to her.

'I must leave right away or it'll be too late.' He meant to say it, but in the woman's arms he forgot.

'As soon as she's sound asleep I'll go,' he thought. 'I'll slip out of bed in two minutes. I'll dress outside.' He listened to her breath. She was moving her body as though she wished every bit of it to be bathed in the silver light.

'My beautiful Liuba. One more minute, two more perhaps, and then I must go.'

He waited for her to be soundly asleep; he fell asleep himself.

The shock of something cold against his chest awoke him. Also he couldn't breathe. He saw at once the man who held the revolver against his heart. He didn't see the other man, who had his hand over Andrei's mouth, until he tried to turn his head towards Liuba. They took him from the bed. Andrei didn't resist. He understood the enquiring look of one of the men and signalled with his eyes towards the chair in the corner. They picked up his shirt and shoes and trousers. The older of the two couldn't take his eyes off the sleeping girl. Andrei made a gesture towards the blanket, to cover her, but already they were pushing him to the door. The older one walked behind Andrei, his fat sweaty hand on Andrei's neck.

In the garden they gave him his clothes. There was a terrible, heartrending cry:

'Andrei!'

Liuba, naked, stood on the doorstep.

'Go back,' he said, 'it's nothing.'

She took a step forward, only one, and then in a harsh cracked voice she cried:

'Andrei!'

The younger of the two put the handcuffs on Andrei's wrists and with a rough gesture signalled him to follow. The other had stopped and was staring at the naked girl. She, suddenly, began to move strangely, turning, and then she fell. He listened to the thud of her body against the hard ground and the small noises of the pebbles scattered by her fall. Then he, too, left the garden.

4

'It's all finished, sir. Wake up. We've got him. It's all done.'*

'Stop shouting like a stuck pig, Eder, you'll wake the whole village. Give me a drink first and then wake me up.'

The paladin was already holding the jug of wine. Slavko raised himself on one elbow and drank, great gurgling swallows. He wiped his mouth with the back of his hand, lifted the jug to his lips again, thought better of it, and got up.

'He wasn't alone, I suppose.'

'No, he had a naked woman in bed with him. We caught him with

his pants off all right. He was sleeping without a care in the world. It took us two hours to crawl through the garden on our stomachs, like a pair of snakes, while he was having a fine old time in bed.'

He made an obscene gesture.

'Come along, Dr Maritech. You see now how I operate. While I'm getting drunk I work out my plan. While I sleep it is carried out. And when I wake up it's all done. Come along now,'

Eder led the way. The path climbed fairly steeply. Maritch took care not to get in front of Slavko. At the same time he was impressed by the youthful agility and speed of the Commissioner. Perhaps everything about the man was false: his drunkenness, his laziness, maybe even his stomach, who knows?

'We're nearly there,' said Eder, pointing to the left where they could see some shadows moving.

Slavko said, over his shoulder to Maritch:

'There are many reasons why I haven't been killed yet. The gentlemen in Belgrade would be only too happy to have me out of the way, but how are they to set about it? You see, I know much too much about them. They could, of course, arrange for me to be bumped off. Only I happen to have made arrangements in case I should meet an unexpected end. Twenty-four hours after my death little numbered bulletins will begin to appear in various parts of the country. The first will be quite harmless. A matter of certain sums of money changing hands - to the advantage of a couple of generals and three colonels. It was connected with a certain armament contract. Not really important. It just happens to involve ten of the foremost families in the land. Numbers two, three and four have more body to them. With number five the real fun begins. It's to do with the King. It starts with a side-splitting anecdote concerning some stolen Lipizzaner horses. It gets less amusing as it goes on. Big business is no laughing matter. Neither is blood. In any case, young gentleman, I should advise you to ask your worthy papa whether in his opinion it is smart to treat Miroslav Hrvatic as though he were a . . . a culprit.'

They had soon reached the group, gathered around a sturdy tree.

'Untie him! Take off the handcuffs!' Slavko ordered.

He sat down on a stump and signalled to Andrei to come over. Another gesture sent his men and Maritch some twenty yards away.

'You, must forgive me. I assure you I never ordered that you be handcuffed and tied to a tree trunk'

Since Andrei remained silent, Slavko added:

'Particularly since I have nothing to arrest you for. All I want from

you is a simple piece of information. You know what it is don't you?"

'No.'

'No? You disappoint me, Andrei Bocek. I said in my last report that since Vasso Militch unfortunately left us you now have the best brains of anyone in the C.P. And you don't know what I want? Well, well, cigarette? Non-smoker, eh? Convenient. You won't have to give them up in prison. Yes, as I say, just one piece of information. Two sentences. And off you trot back to the pretty round breasts of your girl. You're young, by God, and fresh and not bad-looking, Bocek, not bad-looking at all. Now about the little piece of information: you had a meeting at which a Prussian was present. I don't want to know his name or anything else about him. I know you wouldn't give it to me, even if my men hacked you to pieces. Let's forget him. Let's assume there never was a German communist at your last meeting. But one thing about that meeting does interest me: is there going to be a change in the Party line in regard either to the national question or to the agrarian question?"

Andrei said nothing. Slavko, who had taken a box of cigarettes from his pocket, replaced it, and producing a pouch of tobacco in its place proceeded to roll himself a cigarette. Andrei was attentively watching his gestures; the violent kick in the stomach caught him unawares. He was doubled up with pain.

"So you don't feel like talking? Neither do I. I'm sick of everything, and particularly of the people in Belgrade, I can tell you. And your lot, too, I'm dead sick of you. I've always done what I could for you communists. True, one isn't always one's own master. But do I get any thanks? Does anyone ever feel sorry for me? If I had that one bit of unimportant information I'd be all right with Belgrade. All right. They'll send someone else down here, and he'll beat you to a pulp, whereas me, I'm really your friend. I tell you if the Red Army turned up tomorrow I'd be hoisting a red flag. I'd arrest the King, the government, anybody you cared to mention. As a matter of fact I've drawn up a list already and I'd hand it over to you immediately. Only unfortunately the Red Army's not likely to get here just yet. We've been waiting for it for rather a long time now, haven't we? It looks like we'll have to go on waiting too, and meanwhile I've got to hang on to my job at any price, for my sake and for yours too. Do you see?"

"Balls!" said Andrei. The pain in his stomach was going and he added: 'Rubbish!'

'Balls, you say? Rubbish? Why? Don't you believe that I'm probably the most barefaced opportunist in the country?'

'I do indeed. But we don't need opportunists now and we'll need them even less when we're in power.'

'Really? You won't need a police force, either? There are no policemen in Russia? Let me tell you this: you can live without bread if you have to but not without the police. You'll find they'll need people like me a hell of a lot more than they'll ever need people like you.'

Andrei interrupted him:

'I've got nothing at all to tell you, so why don't you let me go?'

'Yes, it's getting late. The night's nearly over. It's chilly now. Perhaps you're cold with only a shirt on. All right, go. But wait a minute. Wouldn't you like to know who betrayed you?'

'No one betrayed me. I was a fool and put myself into a trap. I could have been way over the other side of the mountains hours ago.'

'Really? And how do you suppose I knew where your girl lived?' Andrei hesitated.

'That wouldn't be hard to find out.'

'I didn't have to find it out. I was told. The Party betrayed you.'

'Individuals can betray, the Party never.'

'All right, all right, I know that gramophone record. I know your Marxist missal by heart. You're beginning to bore me. You won't tell me what I want to know? Go along then. No, wait a minute. Come here and look at these papers, you bloody fool. You don't want to give away any secrets and I already know all your piddling secrets. I've got it all here, in black and white, the decisions you made at that meeting, the August 1st proclamation, everything, I've got the lot. And now get off. I don't need you.'

Slavko raised his hand and pointed.

'That way. Get going.'

Andrei looked at him with distrust. He thought: 'If I go that way I'm sunk. He'll have me shot in the back and say I was trying to escape.' Slavko still pointed. There was nothing else he could do. Andrei turned away and started walking. He counted his steps. At the eighteenth he heard the first shot. It missed him. He turned back and started to run towards Slavko. After two steps shots rang out one after the other. He fell.

The men ran up. Slavko shouted:

'Maritch! Who ordered you to shoot that man?'

'Are you crazy?' Maritch cried. 'I shoot?'

'Murder, a cold-blooded murder, that's what you've done. I didn't

see you do it myself, otherwise I'd have stopped you. But there were plenty of witnesses.'

'They're not witnesses, they're assassins; your people. You're killers.'

'Do you or do you not admit you shot him?'

'I most certainly did not shoot him.'

'All right, all right. There's no need to get excited. Perhaps you didn't really kill him. But at least go and see how the poor fellow is. He may not be quite dead. I wouldn't want him to suffer unnecessarily.'

Eder remained with Slavko.

'Eder, if a thing like that ever happens again, I'll see you get such a beating that you'll have to hide your pretty face for a month.'

'I'm sorry. I can't understand how the first shot could have missed. I really don't understand.'

'All right, for this once I'll let it pass. All the same we can't say the poor devil was trying to escape.'

'No. but once he'd turned back I was right to aim for his heart, wasn't I?'

'I suppose so. Now listen carefully. It's Maritch who shot him. Everyone in the town must know that. Now pay attention and listen to what you've got to do. . . .'

Slavko gave his orders. Eder repeated them back to him, word for word.

5

The carriage had set off with Slavko's men and the corpse. He and Maritch were following on foot. It was to return and pick them up on the main road.

As they passed through the village the innkeeper ran out. He had obviously been waiting for them.

'Mr Commissioner, sir, you forgot to pay your bill!'

'Have you made it out properly, item by item?'

'Yes, sir. Here it is.'

Slavko put it in his pocket.

'Are you settling it, sir?'

'I never pay a bill on an empty stomach. Come to my office tomorrow. In any case there are one or two things I want to question you about, nothing much, just some smuggling. You may have to stay for a few months, as my guest naturally. Still, it's a good prison and the food is edible. That'll make us quits.'

The man understood at last. He stopped where he was, stock still, as though turned to stone. Slavko and Maritch continued their walk.

The wind had changed. Coming now from the east it blew away the woolly clouds. The sun rose into an azure sky, clear save for a few rosy strips of cloud, stretched like floating ribbons.

The voice, harsh and broken to begin with, grew clearer as the song went on. A fine, strong, virile voice. . . .

*Zoroulay,
Wake him not, my beloved
Let my lover sleep,
Whom the night so late brought to me.*

*Zoroulay,
The day becomes too bright.
My lover's lips are lovelier,
Are redder than your rising light.*

Slavko sang all the verses, many of which Maritch had never before heard. He sang the refrain *Zoroulay, zoroulay*, with such poignant sadness that Maritch had to struggle against the emotion it aroused.

Walking with Slavko, to the slow rhythm of the song, Maritch thought: 'I'd willingly give ten years of my life to have that man die before sunset tonight.'

It was now full daylight, a beautiful luminous day.

CHAPTER V

I

EARLY in the morning Josmar and Doino learned that the police had gone to get Andrei and that he had escaped. A little later his brother-in-law arrived with the news that the fisherman had been arrested. They had tortured him but he hadn't talked.

'A comrade?' Josmar asked.

'No, not even a sympathiser. If he can keep it up till tonight everything should be all right for Andrei.'

They thought Winter had gone, but about midday he turned up. He too had bad news. Voyko had been caught; naturally he wouldn't speak, but he had valuable documents on his person. The others had

taken to the open country. Winter had his personal plan all ready. In two hours there was a cruise boat leaving for Athens. He would join it as an ordinary tourist - he had Czech papers that were in order - and getting off at Cattaro would make for the interior by way of the Montenegrin mountains. He was quite calm and sure of himself. The Voyko business was obviously unfortunate, but the important thing was that Andrei had not been caught and would now, presumably, get away. He could be in Vienna in three days. Karel had made all necessary arrangements. Doino was to stay where he was. As for Josmar, he was to wait for two or three days and then he'd be taken around the country to have a look at what was going on.

'How do you suppose the police heard of our meeting?' Josmar asked.

'I neither know nor care. They got there too late, and that's all that matters now.'

'Not much too late,' said Doino. 'They pinched Voyko. They may still catch Andrei. It's all extremely worrying.'

'Of course it is. Conspiracy is worrying work. Preparing a revolution is quite a worry. In fact, life itself is just really one long worry. Take me for instance. I intended originally to keep bees. Well, let it pass.'

They heard the news about noon next day. Dock workers who lived in the southern quarter of the town had found Andrei's corpse while on their way to work.

That afternoon they went into the town, to the bookshop which Doino knew as the Party's secret meeting-place. The bookseller knew the facts and although he was disturbed, for Andrei had been a close friend of his, he was clearly deriving a certain curious pleasure from being able to divulge such sensational news. He had a young and extremely expressive face, his rosy complexion contrasting oddly with his prematurely white hair. His expression now showed a mixture of sorrow, anger and a satisfied hunger for sensation.

The story of Andrei's murder had spread like a trail of gunpowder. By eight in the morning there was nobody who did not know of it. And, curiously enough, it was also common knowledge that it wasn't Slavko's men but a new arrival, a certain Dr Maritch, who had fired the two shots, point blank, at Andrei. That time there was no nonsense about an attempted escape. It was murder, a simple case of murder without any attempt at camouflage. Then there was the odd fact that the police were allowing a public funeral which meant that they would not ban a demonstration. Thirdly, the police patrols had all disappeared

off the streets, together with the agents who were normally to be seen in the working-men's quarter. The police had apparently taken fright and decided to make 'themselves scarce. And that wasn't all. The middle class were aroused by the murder. Factories were closing at four so that everyone could follow the coffin. This amounted to a general strike, and one supported by the employers, as a sign of mourning and a gesture of protest.

'It means,' said Josmar, 'the capitalists are frightened too.'

'No,' explained the bookseller: 'The fact is that Maritch's foul crime is seen by everybody as the murder of a Croat by a Serb.'

Slavko was certainly an abominable creature, but at least he was a Croat and he would not coldly shoot a compatriot at point blank range and without rhyme or reason. In the town they were saying that it was a typical example of Serb brutality and had nothing to do with the anti-communist campaign. 'Anyhow,' the bourgeoisie were saying, 'even if it did have a political angle the workers would never stand for the murder of a man like their Bocek. After all, he was born here, and if it was necessary to get rid of him there was still no need to call in Serbian bandits to do it.'

The bookseller interrupted himself, and there was real sorrow in his voice:

'Do you know the sort of man he was? He was a proper leader.'

'That's why they killed him,' said Doino. 'They know what they're doing.'

'Quite,' said the bookseller, and then he ran out into the street, for he had seen someone he knew. He was soon back. 'It's terrific! The funeral will be a monster demonstration.'

Doino asked him:

'Do you know me? Do you know who I am?'

'Yes, of course.'

'Do you think the comrades of the Regional Committee know me or have heard of me?'

'Some of them, certainly.'

'Then get me in touch with them at once. It's obvious that this is all a dangerous trap, a provocation. I must warn them.'

'Provocation? What do you mean?' asked Josmar. 'It's a wonderful chance to come out into the open for once, and we must take it surely.'

'Yes, yes, naturally,' Doino said without looking at him.

The bookseller had already left the shop.

His wife, a tall, gaunt creature, was sitting behind a table covered with books. So far she had said nothing, but now she spoke:

'Are you sure that such a man as Andrei ever lived?'

'What do you mean?' asked Josmar, looking at her for the first time.

'This morning at market, the peasant women were weeping, I saw them. But you, you Party members, I haven't heard a single word of sorrow or regret from any one of you. Yet Andrei really did live, he . . .'

Sobs stifled her.

2

The tempo of events grew faster. Even though he was a direct participant in these events, Josmar had the sensation that they were slipping away from him, that they belonged to the realms of fantasy and not of fact. As happens only in dreams, men's faces seemed to change from hour to hour, and the hours themselves moved with an unequal rhythm. Familiar, faces, distances, streets, the very walls seemed to alter, to lack all permanence.

Josmar knew this town quite well. He had spent ten days here with Lisbeth, at the time when everything was fine between them. They had sat outside the cafés that clustered in a half circle around the port, or had climbed through the narrow, dark alleys that led up to the ruins of a Roman Emperor's palace. They had admired the enormous, modernistic statue of a Slav saint, too big for the square in front of the ruins. They had gone up the small mountain that capped the outermost promontory, and from its brow had gazed at the islands scattered over the azure sea.

Generally tourists didn't stay more than two days. In the evening they would mingle with the local population which only seemed to wake up and come to life after sundown. The town was lit in good taste and at night each little square appeared to be set for the performance of some operetta. They dined on balconies upheld by weathered Lions of Venice. They expected to be serenaded and, inevitably, they were. Everyone seemed cast for a part in the operetta which, after midnight, became a *commedia del'arte*.

That was the town which Josmar had known. Now it was changing before his eyes. The colours of the setting remained the same, fantastic and brilliant, the red of the bricks, the blue of the sky, the white of the marble, but they ceased to be theatrical, to be make-believe. In vain the tourists waited for the serenades and the 'typically Mediterranean street scenes' which they had been promised at the tourist office. The town was closed up, shut down, shuttered, waiting.

During the night the comrades had changed their headquarters four times. The first had been a printer's workshop. Winter had appeared there unexpectedly and they had moved to the office of a steamship company: then to a deserted villa on the outskirts of the town: and finally to the back room of the bookseller's shop from which there were three ways out.

The first change that Josmar had noticed was in Doino. He had stopped rationalising, interpreting particular facts in terms of general theories or fitting them into his wide and logical cosmos. His interests had suddenly narrowed, had become circumscribed in space by this town and in time by the events of the past twenty-four hours and of the eight or twelve hours to come. When Winter arrived he, too, had changed. He seemed thinner and harder, and his words and gestures were no longer either slow or easygoing. He said he agreed entirely with Doino's analysis of the situation. Andrei had not been killed in the town. His body had been brought back because they – by which he meant Slavko – had a definite end in view. Only Slavko could have put out the story that Maritch was the murderer. Therefore, it was untrue and must constitute an essential part of his plan. It all pointed to an enormous booby-trap which, because of the provisional uncertainty of the end in view, appeared dangerous in the extreme. The withdrawal of the police from the streets, while spies were certainly circulating, was another sinister pointer. Had it not been for Doino's intervention and Winter's firm attitude the Party would have fallen into the trap. The local leaders were no longer in control of the situation for the simple reason that Andrei was no longer at their head. Instead of controlling the masses they were being dragged along by them.

Josmar noticed two transformations in the secretary of the Regional Committee. At first the tall young man with the sparkling brown eyes had had the firm gestures of one who knows exactly what he's doing. The first transformation took place after his conversation with Doino and Winter. His gestures grew abrupt and lacking in co-ordination, while his eyes seemed to sink into their sockets and lose their lustre. He spoke rapidly, quoting Marx, Lenin, and Engels, and continually referring to some book on Baboeuf which he had presumably just read. Then quite unexpectedly, as though he suddenly realised and was frightened by the pointlessness of all he had said, his tone changed. His eyes filled with tears:

'You people don't know how much Andrei meant to us here.'
He was like a little orphan, begging for pity. Doino looked up from

the map of the town that he was poring over with Winter and a young comrade.

'I do know,' he said. 'He was like a younger brother to me. Now come here and help us work out the itinerary. We'll have to form five columns....'

The secretary went over to them. During the course of the night he was to undergo yet another transformation.

Josmar began to feel increasingly confused. He knew about fighting, he thought he understood the methods of their particular warfare, but here the preparations that were being made only mystified him. Why was it necessary to postpone the funeral to the next day? Why had the time not yet been fixed? Why were leaflets being printed urging no isolated incidents and above all no provocation of the police? Wasn't one supposed to fight as and when one had the opportunity to do so? Hadn't they fought in Berlin, on May Day 1929? Of course a few workers had lost their lives, but all the same it had been a grand gesture. Why then this hesitancy? Here was the whole town ready to march and demonstrate. After years of being outlawed and driven underground, here was surely a magnificent chance that should be seized and exploited for all it was worth. The country, the whole world would see it as a call to arms, a beacon. They could capture the police station, the telegraph office....

He tried several times to explain his point of view, but no one listened to him so after a while he gave up. Doino and Winter were busy sending messengers to the neighbouring villages with exact instructions concerning the route to be followed, on the organisation of the columns of mourners (first the women, Party members to be well dispersed among the others and not grouped together), on the various slogans, and so forth.

It was past midnight, and they had just arrived at the villa when they learned of the incident. As soon as the young man was brought in they saw that he had something unusual about him, so great was the nervous tension he produced.

'Who are you?' Winter asked.

'My name is Bogdan Daviditch. I joined the Party three years ago. In Paris. I'm a native of Belgrade. I've lived here for the past six months. Do you want any more facts about me?'

'Yes, but not for the moment. Why did you ask to be brought here?'

'To tell you Maritch has been assassinated.'

'Where and when?'

'Just outside his house. Half an hour ago.'

'How do you know?'

'I saw it.'

'You just happened to be there?'

'Yes.'

'You're lying. Tell the truth. You can't deceive the Party. Well?'

'No, I didn't just happen to be there. I was waiting for Maritch, in the doorway of the house opposite. He came round a corner, on his way home I suppose. I was waiting for him to get a little closer when all of a sudden some men came up behind him. He heard them and turned. He shouted something and they shot him. They had silencers on their guns, so I hardly heard the shots but I saw the flashes. He fell. One of them whistled. A car drove up at once. They threw the body in and went off with it.'

'Did you see their faces?'

'Not clearly. I couldn't describe them.'

'Why were you waiting for Maritch?'

'To kill him. To avenge Bocek's death. Also I wanted to prove that it wasn't a question of hostility between Serbs and Croats but of the class struggle. Also Maritch is a traitor or rather he was one. We were friends once, in the same student secret society. He went over to the police.'

'You fool, you know nothing. Maritch was a Party member, deliberately infiltrated into the police. Don't you even know the elementary rule about individual acts of terrorism? You, a communist? You're a criminal, an *agent provocateur*, that's what you are. The Party tribunal will deal with you.'

The dialogue between the two men had taken place very rapidly and in an atmosphere of almost unbearable tension. By the time Josmar had fully grasped the significance of what he had just heard the others were already back at work. New leaflets had to be written and a new plan drawn up. The alarm must be given in Belgrade at once. Maritch's father had to be told that Slavko's killers had murdered his son and that Slavko was certainly preparing a bloodbath on the pretext of avenging the murder.

They were surprised to discover that the telephone in the villa had not been disconnected. Daviditch was to ring through immediately to a friend who worked for one of the big Belgrade papers and give him the facts. The others left the villa, since the telephone conversation would make it suspect.

'You're a surrealist painter, aren't you?' Winter asked Daviditch as he was leaving. 'Before you're kicked out of the Party in disgrace you must explain to me what that's all about - say tomorrow evening if

we're both still alive. Don't stay here a moment longer than is necessary for your call. Then go straight home and go to bed.'

'I'll do exactly what you say,' answered Daviditch. The night had frightened him. He had started out, resolute, prepared for vengeance and martyrdom. He was finishing it alone, a messenger of death.

3

Josmar did not feel that he was being useless, even though no one asked him to help with the arrangements. He was there to observe and not to act. So he allowed himself to doze for a few minutes at a time. Whenever he awoke he found fresh people in the room. Only Doino, Winter and the Regional Secretary remained constant.

Once when he awoke a blonde girl was there. Whether silent or talking, she kept twisting a white handkerchief between her fingers and squeezing it into a ball; it looked as though she wanted to dab her eyes with it, but instead she kept putting it to her mouth as if to stifle a cry. She had a deep, almost masculine voice.

'The last page but one was torn out. On the last page the only words were: "It's an abominable suspicion. The traitor, whoever he is, holds a key position in the Party. He's powerful since he can make bargains with Slavko. Eder is an expert shot. He killed Bocek. He's the one who'll kill me, if Slavko dares to get rid of me. The important thing is to find out who the traitor is." That's all that's on the last page.'

'Where is the notebook now?' Winter asked. 'Why didn't you bring it? You're quoting from memory. I don't care for that way of doing things. When you left Maritch's rooms you should have come straight here with the notebook.'

The girl didn't answer.

'We'll put it in some safe place,' said Doino. 'Tomorrow we'll have it photographed.'

'It's safe with me,' she answered. 'I won't give it to anyone.'

Eventually a man was sent with her to copy out the important passages.

A little later, when Josmar awoke again, he saw an enormous bag of almonds on the table. He heard Doino asking:

'So you started with the idea of being a beekeeper. Why didn't you stick to it?'

Winter, smiling, took a handful of almonds from the paper bag and passed them one by one into his mouth.

'How about you? You were planning to be a professor of ancient history, and now . . . here you are eating up the almonds of a poor labourer's son.'

Another time when he opened his eyes he saw two men standing up. One of them was slowly rolling a cigarette as he said:

'Not more than two hours in any case. And even that's tricky enough. Still we can promise to hold the train up so it won't reach here before 10.45. If that's a long enough delay, good. Otherwise you'll have to think up something else. And there's no point asking us to blow the tunnel. Can't be done.'

'10.45,' Winter repeated. 'That might do it, provided you're sure you can stop Slavko telephoning during that time. Or getting hold of a car.'

'Let's be blunt, comrade. If he must be stopped at any price, I repeat, *at any price*, then tell me, and it'll be done. I must know exactly what you want and what you don't want.'

'Stop him *at any price*,' said Winter, after a moment's pause. 'It'll be over by 10.30 at the latest. Slavko must not get back before then.'

4

The heads of the columns reached the cemetery half-way up the hillside almost at the same moment. The peasants had started very early. As their two long files came winding down from the heights above the town it looked almost as though the mountains themselves were moving. The third group came up from the town to meet them, and the other two from either direction along the coast road. For ten minutes the hooters of ships and factories moaned a dirge. The pall bearers advanced slowly but at a steady pace. In front of them walked an old woman, Andrei's mother. They were in full sunshine. Motionless, thousands of pairs of eyes watched the mother of the murdered man. For her it was a hard climb. Each one there wished that he could somehow help her, support her, and each one knew it would be wrong to try to do so. The Heavens and He who sits in Heaven must see that there is no consolation possible for so great an injustice.

Winter and Doino also felt the oppression of the silence that they themselves had ordered. They exchanged glances. They had done well to organise the cortège in this way, with the old woman at the head and without any flags or banners.

Then something happened, something so unimportant in itself that

it couldn't have been foreseen by the organisers. The old mother staggered, lost her balance, and fell.

A cry broke out, a cry from a thousand throats. It was as though their own cry overpowered them, making them break their ranks and hurling them down the hillside. Hundreds of them surrounded the pall-bearers and the old woman. Thousands more ran on, down into the town, down to the police station, the law courts and the barracks of the constabulary near the docks.

Only a few hundred, mostly Party members, stayed for the burial of Andrei. As they broke into the *International*, after Winter's brief funeral oration was over, they saw the smoke rising straight up into the summer sky. And as they ran down the hill they watched the flames like the red ribbons of a belated dawn, licking at the blue sky. The peasants were burning the official buildings, hunting the police like rabbits, and, when they caught one, killing him like a rat.

Slavko, who had meanwhile been deprived of his office, was reinstated on the second day with special powers, and received instructions to re-establish law and order. He had placed under his command a mixed force of infantry and cavalry, together with a detachment of marines.

Slavko, now more powerful than ever, soon restored perfect order.

Those in the know whispered that before the month was out he would be ruined, in jail, finished for ever. But there were others who believed that Slavko would serve any government and survive them all.

The Party went underground again, but with greatly increased prestige. It was said that the rising had followed, to the minutest details, the prearranged Party plan. And the Politburo decided that this was to be the truth.

CHAPTER VI

I

THE most striking thing about him was his mouth. At times it seemed an enormous cavity, across which his thick lips were for ever trying to touch or to avoid one another, in obscene mimicry of some ballet; then it would change its shape, to become the lipless mouth of a sensual ascetic, and growing smaller still, would close up to a thin line across his face, puckered at either end. This mouth

dominated his whole face like a great actor playing Lear, with a supporting cast of amateurs. Broad cheekbones, big ears, a bald head tanned by the sun, even the eyes which were large and intelligent whether in sorrow or in mirth, they all sank into insignificance as soon as he opened his mouth.

That was Djoura. He had been everything in his time, a village schoolmaster, an aviator, an actor, a theatrical producer, and, finally, a sheep farmer. But since the age of eighteen he had also been a waiter, and many thought him the best in the land. No matter what sort of life he was living, he always wrote at regular hours which varied with the seasons of the year. Even Slavko recognised this and forbade all access to Djoura's cell during these periods. Slavko was in the custom of sitting outside Djoura's door while he wrote, for it was the writer's habit to say each sentence aloud, slowly, before committing it to paper. Then, in the evening, sitting in his favourite café, Slavko would hold forth about how Djoura's new book was coming along. The whole town followed its development with a keen interest. And with relief too, for it was clear that no harm would come to Djoura so long as Slavko remained enraptured in the daily progress of his work.

'Look, you Prussian, do you see that cloud of dust blowing over there? The one that looks as though its stationary. That's us, that's our country. When it rains that dust becomes thick, gluey mud. The seasons of our life alternate between dust and mud. We still live in the fourteenth century, and our Andreis die because they want to lead us into the twenty-first. Civilised nations have a past; their Don Quixotes try to go back to an age that is over. Our Don Quixotes throw themselves towards the future. They leap forward and fall into the chasm, into the arms of Slavko.'

Josmar was on the point of answering 'Rubbish!' but he said nothing. This was not the proper sort of place for a serious discussion. He kept his eyes on the pilgrims' road that zigzagged up towards the chapel on the brow of the hill. The dust hung heavily over the road and over the surrounding hills, it settled in a thin blanket over the grass and the wilting flowers and the grey trees. The heat was appalling beneath the lead-coloured sky that completely hid the sun.

Now and then Josmar observed a carriage containing fat ladies, the wives of officials or the family of a rich grocer; in general, however, the pilgrims went up on foot, for it was said that the madonna only performed miracles for those who came to her shrine in humility and pain. So they dragged themselves up the hill, leaning on their crutches

or limping up the steep incline, with dust in their hair, dust in their eyes, dust on their holiday clothes.

Josmar had now spent two weeks travelling through Montenegro, Herzegovina and Bosnia before coming to this farming country. He had seen shepherds guarding their flocks, miners, woodcutters, peasants high in the mountains. He had talked to members of peasant committees, trades union officials, regional secretaries of the Party, school teachers, travelling salesmen, road-menders, social assistants.

The more he saw of the land, the less did his impressions tally with his preconceived ideas of it. He had passed through a hodge-podge of disconnected scenes, and he preferred not to think about them, for they only confused him. The documents he had read: *An Appreciation of the Situation* or *A Thesis on the Current Position in the Country* remained the truth for him, though such documents bore less and less relationship to what he was seeing.

This morning he had joined Djoura. At last he was to meet Vasso's wife, who lived nearby. Josmar was not quite sure why the novelist had brought him to see this pilgrimage. It seemed unlikely that Mara would be there. But it was impossible for him to get a straight answer to a straight question. Sometimes when one spoke to him he didn't even seem to be listening: he would talk for a quarter of an hour at a stretch: or he would be sunk into a silence so profound that nothing external made the slightest impression on him.

Josmar had once read a novel of Djoura's: *Story of a Peasant Family*. He couldn't remember the plot at all clearly, but he did recall that all the characters had died except two, an abandoned and simple-minded girl and a slightly crazy young man. The book had ended with an extraordinary scene of violence. A woman had surprised the pasty young man engaged in robbing her house. He had decided to murder her, although she was bigger and stronger than he, and had run at her with his hands out, ready to strangle her. The reader was left in ignorance of what happened then, because the book ended abruptly at that point. Perhaps the woman defended herself, killed the young man, who knows?

Josmar hadn't much cared for the book. Djoura was, as he knew, a very important figure in the movement, but it was hard to think of him as a real communist. Josmar even found it hard to speak to him in the second person singular, as was the custom between Party members.

So they joined the column of pilgrims. It would have been easy for them to walk faster than the others, but Djoura insisted that they go at

the same pace as the rest and indeed seemed to derive some pleasure from so doing. Had he been holding one of the big, beribboned candles in his hand, he could easily have passed as a true pilgrim, Josmar thought. Even his black suit, in which he must have been consciously sweating, fitted into the scene.

Beggars lay beside the road, cripples such as Josmar had never seen. Among them were very young boys, dressed only in a sort of shift, showing to the passers-by limbs that were deformed, bloated or shrunken. They didn't ask for alms. They were the spectacle; others begged on their behalf, crying out in a monotonous, liturgical dirge.

But it was right at the top, on the piece of level ground before the chapel, that the most monstrous abortions were on display. It was necessary to pass close to them in order to reach the ikon of the miraculous virgin.

'You'll notice that it's a Byzantine Madonna, painted a hundred years before Giotto,' Djoura whispered, as they approached the picture. 'They won't have anything to do with newer, subtler or prettier virgins; they don't believe them capable of performing miracles.'

When they had passed behind the chapel, to where a brisk and noisy market was being held, Josmar asked:

'Do they really believe in miracles?'

'If a man can only be saved by a miracle, he believes in miracles. That's reasonable enough.'

'But when the pilgrims see the cripples and monsters who obviously haven't got any better through being here, it must make them a bit suspicious.'

'Well said, Prussian. It was to get you to think along those lines that I dragged you all the way up here. For many years it has been proved that proximity to the miraculous virgin is useless as a cure for anything. And this proof means nothing at all. Because the belief that a miracle might one day happen is a far more urgent need than the miracle itself.'

'Tell me, was it just to get a chance to make that epigram that you brought me through all this filth?'

'And why not? It's not a waste of time. When you get back to Berlin and draw up your report on the progress of the class struggle among our mountains, it is essential that somewhere among your close and well-ordered arguments you should insert a touch of something entirely different. With you Germans everything always "fits", in fact it always fits too well, which is why you invariably lose your wars when they last a little longer than you had anticipated.'

'I'm not interested in that sort of thing. When and where will I meet Vasso's wife?'

'Near here, soon, today in fact, perhaps within an hour. Mara won't be alone and she'll need your support.'

2

Mara came from a noble military family. Their name was one to conjure with. Children knew it as soon as they were old enough to read the names at the corners of the streets. Her ancestors were immortalised in stone and bronze, gallant cavaliers on prancing horses. Those ancestors had not only led their compatriots, stolid pikemen, against the hereditary Turkish enemy, but had also fought with them at the farthest confines of Europe, where this savage soldiery had spread terror among the inhabitants. When Milan had to be recaptured for the Hapsburgs or the Hungarian revolutionaries suppressed, Mara's ancestors distinguished themselves again, brave officers in the service of Austria. One became a general of cavalry.

All the same, her grandfather had broken the family tradition, being dismissed from the army at the age of fifty-eight, just before the world war and on the eve of his promotion to the rank of general.

In order that there might be no doubt about his disgrace he was retired from the service without the customary promotion, an almost unheard of state of affairs. All this was because he had dabbled in politics; he had joined the party that centred round the heir to the throne, a party which held a point of view that was unpopular at court. He only survived his humiliation by a few days, falling victim to an 'unexpected hunting accident' in the official version. He had shot himself. That was the beginning of the decline. Mara's father took that decline a stage further, but still the family maintained its position until the final collapse of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy.

Her father was wise enough not to become involved in politics. He was a punctilious officer, at all times a slave to the conventions of his chosen profession. What he had learned as a boy at the Maria-Theresa Military Academy continued to regulate his life until the end - at least so far as his external life on the barrack square or in the officers' mess was concerned. For he did have a secret vice. It could be ignored only so long as it remained completely secret. He wrote poetry.

Over various pseudonyms his verses appeared in the modern reviews. He started with excellent translations of Baudelaire. Then he went on

to write poems of his own, attractive verses with a marked Baudelairean influence. The editors accepted them willingly, and doubtless imagined that their author was probably some bank employee with time on his hands, perhaps a well-off Jew.

Mara was the third and youngest daughter of this cavalry captain. He would have preferred to go into the artillery but this suspicious leaning towards a definite social decline was suppressed, and so he had entered the cavalry. When he was alone with his youngest daughter they talked in the language of the country, a language normally used only for giving orders to servants, since among themselves the gentry spoke a sort of Viennese German, heavily interlarded with words and phrases from the French. Due to these conversations Mara, who was almost exactly as old as the century, came gradually to share secrets with her father. She loved him more and more with a love that tended to become almost fraternal as she grew older. She didn't care for her Hungarian mother, nor for her sisters, who shared secrets from which she was excluded. At twelve Mara realised that they were beautiful and believed that she was ugly and that her father was probably the only man who would ever love her. She also knew – and she thought that she was the only member of the family who did know – that he was a poet. She had more sympathy for him than respect.

Like her sisters she owned a little inlaid box which she could lock with a small gold key. Her sisters undoubtedly kept feverish love-letters in their boxes. In hers she hid her father's poems.

The 'affaire' began in 1913, a few days after the emperor's birthday. Her father had just been promoted major, a somewhat overdue promotion. It was then that he read her his great poem, an epic entitled *Mathias Gubec*. This Gubec had been the leader of a peasants' revolt, and he, together with the other leaders, had been executed in front of the cathedral, a spot that was still pointed out to visitors. Mara had been taught that Gubec was in reality only a brigand, nothing better than a bandit. However, her father had made him the hero of a poem, a sort of saviour, murdered by the forces of stupidity and greed. Mara found the poem beautiful, but on this occasion her praise did not satisfy the author. He doubted if she had understood it fully; in any case he felt that the poem should be translated into Croatian, Gubec's language, in order to reach the people to whom it would mean most.

The translation appeared a few days before the Sarajevo incident. In the course of the lengthy police investigations that followed that assassination, the name of the author of the poem came up. The results for Mara's father were extremely grave. At home his wife and two

elder daughters blamed him for all their trouble, including the fact that two excellent marriage prospects might evaporate. From the army he received a suggestion that he offer to resign his commission. However, the war had already started. His wife and elder daughters made no particular secret of the fact that they expected him to perform some heroic feat – even if he died in the attempt – to make amends for the inconceivable and puerile wrong that he had done both to the emperor and to his own family. Mara saw how they felt. Their wish was soon gratified. The major was killed in the Serbian campaign. He was ambushed by irregulars, at the head of his troops, and there he died. Thus the *malhereux incident*, as his family called it, was closed.

After her father's death Mara set out to find the man who had translated *Mathias Gubec* into Croat. Since there was no longer any reason for secrecy she wanted to ask him to translate her father's other poems and to publish them over his real name. She found a letter from him among her father's papers and without telling her family she went to see him. He was a boy of eighteen, the son of a grocer in the town notorious for his drunkenness. The adolescent girl fell in love with the young man and, as her shocked family never tired of pointing out to her, 'ran after him disgracefully'. She came to be a cause for gossip in the town. The teachers at the school complained that she was a bad example to her school-fellows.

It didn't last long. After a few months the young man was called up and sent to the Russian front. He froze to death in the Carpathians.

Her teachers soon had cause for complaint against the girl who used to be such a model student. When writing essays the children were allowed to choose their own subject. Mara took to writing on political themes and said things which, since the beginning of the war, were liable to bring a grown-up before a special tribunal. At sixteen the girl declared war on the war. After a while she found that there were others engaged in the same struggle. Whether she found them or they found her, in any case she was no longer alone. And what she thought she didn't only put into her school essays. From then on she was 'Mara' to her new friends, though her real name was really Maria-Theresa-Elisabeth and her family called her Betsy.

In view of her social position, the police tactfully called her mother's attention to the fact that her daughter was engaged in unsuitable, even subversive activities directed against the security of the state. Obviously the unfortunate girl had inherited certain regrettable characteristics from her unfortunate father. Mara was withdrawn from the school and sent to the most remote of the family's estates.

'Towards the end of the 1914-1918 War, when the Croats began to desert singly and in groups, they tended to come together in what were known as 'Green Bands'. The rumour soon spread through these bands that on Mara's estate, thanks to the young *châtelaine*, there was a safe refuge from the police and the patrols; and, what's more, there was plenty to eat with even a little tobacco money thrown in.

Mara helped the deserted to organise their 'Green Bands'. She discovered that she was good at talking to peasants. She learned from her contact with them that her father's epic poem was an important work. She began to look for another Mathias Gubec among the men who came to hide on her estate. Once she thought she had come across the man she was looking for. She realised in time that she was wrong. Then, after the collapse, she met Vasso. He was organising the Communist Party. She joined the Party and stayed with the man. She never left him again.

Ten years later, after the *coup d'état*, the state's hired assassins were sent to get Vasso. As the circle narrowed around his hiding-place he had to leave her. They had arranged that he should go to ground in the mountains, but the Party ordered him to emigrate.

Mara was arrested. The police suspected her of knowing where Vasso was and where the Party archives were hidden. She was the first woman political prisoner in the land to undergo the new methods of torture. During the four days and three nights of this she never opened her lips. On the fourth night she fell into a faint from which all normal restoratives failed to revive her.

She was found next morning in a gully that separates the hill where stand the villas of the new rich from the heights where are the houses and vast gardens of the nobility. She was carried up to the house of her aunt, her father's sister.

Apart from a few flesh wounds, the old lady's doctor found that she was suffering from internal bruises in the neighbourhood of her pelvis, so severe that he could scarcely believe them to have been caused by external blows. He had never come across such a case before.

For many days Mara seemed to have lost the power of speech. It came back to her gradually. Briefly, and without any visible signs of emotion, she described what she had suffered. She never willingly spoke of it again.

All the same the details of her torture and the names of her torturers leaked out, through a policeman who had himself been present, though he assured everyone that 'he had not done anything to hurt a fly'. There was such an outcry that several officials were transferred. A wave

of sympathy for Mara was transformed into a general feeling of sympathy for the persecuted.

Six months later Yovan, Vasso's nineteen-year-old brother, was captured in the workers' quarter. Eight days later his corpse was found in a wood. He had been shot after undergoing tortures that had made him well-nigh unrecognisable. His knee had been sawn through with an ordinary carpenter's saw.

At the cemetery there were demonstrations against the police. Before the coffin was lowered into the ground several of Yovan's friends were arrested and the others were thrown out of the cemetery.

The name of the most sadistic of the policemen involved became known. A few days later he was found dead in his turn, shot through the heart, under a lamp-post in the gully between the two hills. It was established that he had had an appointment with someone there, apparently a woman. People in the know recalled that the major had taught all his daughters to be crack shots.

Josmar also learned that Mara was the one who had arranged the working agreement between the Party and the leader of the peasants, that indeed she was the only person who could have persuaded that wily and cautious old man to take so daring a step.

3

Josmar could hardly disguise his surprise: Mara was small and delicate. One would hardly have noticed her face, had it not been for her eyes, big, dark, deep eyes. She certainly had nothing of the heroine about her.

'So you're the German comrade Soennecke sent?'

'Yes. My name is Josmar Goeben.'

'Have you seen Vasso? Does he look well?'

'Yes.'

After a moment he added:

'We spent a night together, at my We talked a lot. It was after a meeting of your Politburo. He was already tired, of course.'

She smiled as though to forgive him for some unimportant, stupid remark.

'You don't know Vasso. When he's tired it never shows. But if he's unhappy he'll drop off to sleep, sitting on a chair, even in the middle of a conversation. It's not a real sleep, he just drowses. Vasso dozes the way other people weep.'

'During our conversation, the first that we have ever had together,

Vasso criticised the Party, which is, of course, something I cannot excuse.'

'Exactly. Come along and sit down. Legic won't be long.'

It was a very big room, furnished with an odd assortment of old, rustic wooden chests, French closets, English armchairs and divans. All the furniture had been pushed into the corners, so that the centre of the room was bare. On the wall opposite the little windows hung a coloured print of the murdered peasant leader with, below it, a little flame. Josmar had seen such a shrine in every peasant's cottage that he had been in since his travels.

Ivo Legic was one of the successors of this leader. His photograph was often pasted up beside the print of his predecessor. He had a pleasant, thoughtful face with sad eyes and a weak chin; he looked like a trustworthy country solicitor, reliable and on the cautious side, the type of man who would be listened to with respect by honest people and would deliberately avoid dishonest ones, who had no doubt that justice must triumph thanks to his own endeavours.

The police kept constant tabs on him, but there were some places where they didn't dare to follow him. The peasants formed a body-guard and kept strangers away. Legic did not approve of this, but on this matter the peasants took no notice of what he said. In any case, here in his own country near the shrine, there was no danger of their being surprised.

The house, situated among orchards, was easy of access. All the same, should any stranger wander into the neighbourhood he would soon find himself confronted by a group of determined peasants, and if he had no satisfactory explanation for his presence there he would be firmly conducted back to the town. They were silent young men, and they had sworn to protect the life of their new leader. They wouldn't let a hair of his head be touched.

'Well, yes,' Legic was saying in his slow and hesitant manner. 'Of course it's very satisfactory that your Party has at last taken that attitude. It's the only possible one to take with regards to the Croat question. All the same at the moment you're too weak. You've really got nothing to offer us.'

'Our actions at the time of Andrei Bocek's funeral were hardly a sign of weakness,' Djoura said. 'Our friend Goeben was there. In fact, it's thanks to him that the world press was able to print so detailed a report of what happened.'

This was not strictly true, but it had been agreed that this was to be Josmar's rôle during the meeting. As the foreigner, the man from the

great outside world, he was supposed to be in a position to publicise the peasant party abroad . . . if Legic agreed.

'I don't know,' said Legic. 'From what I hear it seems to have been more our show than yours. The peasants were annoyed because they weren't allowed to celebrate my birthday like they did last year. There were more important reasons too.'

'To a certain extent that's true. But my dear Ivo you must realise that without us the peasants wouldn't have done anything. Together, your people and ours . . .'

'Yes, yes, I know. Your friend, I might say our friend, the Austrian Doino Faber, put it very well, though perhaps a little carelessly, when he said: "Here the peasant is the Saint Christopher who can carry us to power on his shoulders."

'Saint Christopher was a very attractive type of saint.'

'But modest, much too modest,' Legic replied. 'We Croats have carried on our shoulders, at various times, Venetians, Austrians, Hungarians and Serbs. We'd really like to try having nobody on our shoulders for a change.'

'We entirely agree. That's the reason for this meeting,' Mara put in.

'I'm not so certain that we do, dear lady. Faber said it with his usual exactitude: "The Croat peasant must carry Yugoslav communism on his shoulders." That's the problem.'

All this talk was merely a prologue to the serious discussion, a typical piece of country rhetoric. Mara soon got down to the essentials. She expounded a programme of peasants' rights and justified claims. Josmar observed with satisfaction that her statements followed exactly the line laid down by the Party, though formulated in other terms.

Legic agreed with what she said. Josmar decided at once that Mara was a superb person. But Legic was unwilling to commit himself to any permanent co-operation with the communist Peasants' Committees and even less with the Party itself. The period of the Red Peasant International, which his predecessor had helped found, was definitely over. And he added:

'A dictatorship like you have in Russia can isolate a country. It can put out what stories it likes and can silence its internal enemies. But now for the first time you've made a serious blunder over there and one that you'll pay for in our country districts here. This time you have accusers whose voices are reaching the last peasant cottage in the land.'

'What are you talking about, Dr Legic?' Mara asked, with impatience.

'The cries of the beasts killed by the peasants when they were

ordered into the collective farms. When peasants kill their cattle and horses it means one of two things: either the peasants are mad or their masters are mad, and, what's more, are fiends into the bargain.'

'Yes, there have been mistakes made. Stalin himself admits that,' said Josmar.

Legic looked at him for the first time. His gaze was quite friendly: 'You speak good Croat, sir. You're an engineer, I believe. Are you Austrian?'

'No, German.'

'Unfortunately Germans understand less than nothing about peasants' problems. It's too bad Marx was a German.'

Mara led him back to the subject. Finally Legic agreed to employ one of his closest colleagues as a permanent liaison man between himself and Mara. Thus, if the need should arise, they could act in concert.

'At least so long as the people in Belgrade don't send me to prison.'

'Would you let them arrest you?'

'Yes. I wouldn't resist. I'd let myself be killed for that matter, although I can't say the idea appeals to me. Anything rather than start a rebellion. In all history there's never been a peasant revolt that's succeeded. Peasants must fight their battles slowly. That's how to win them, like water dripping drop by drop until it's bored through granite.'

'You could hardly call that winning a battle,' Djoura replied.

'I daresay not. But what does it matter? The swords of the others become blunt with hacking and conquering, blunted on the backs of the peasants. They lose blood, of course, that's true of course, but in the long run, the long run . . .'

He couldn't find a way to end what he was saying.

'You're not a peasant yourself. That's why you talk this way,' cried Djoura.

'No, I'm not a peasant. I'm a lawyer, a small town solicitor. My predecessor was a genius: I'm not. He always knew what he wanted; I know what I mustn't want. He was sure of what he was capable of doing; I know very exactly what I can't do. Him they killed: me they'll simply send to prison. He thought you'd be our Saint Christopher and carry us to power, which is why he made a pact with you. Me, I'm afraid of you. I'm a weak person, you see, and I won't renew that pact.'

'We'll be in power,' said Mara. 'In five years, or ten or fifteen. In any case . . .'

Legic interrupted her:

'Yes, yes, you'll be in power. I believe that too. Your family has

always been in power in this country. In five or ten years' time everyone will see that you've remained true to your family traditions after all, dear lady. No, no, I'm not sneering at you. Revolution is made by people who passionately long for justice. Revolution brings to power people who passionately long for power.'

There followed a long discussion. Mara expounded the Marxian attitude towards the peasants and their rights. Again it seemed as though Legic, who listened with great attention, might be converted to her point of view.

'My God you are a clever woman, dear Mara. Everything you say is so true. If I listened to you long enough you'd convert me to communism. And then I wouldn't be of any further interest to you. I am only important to you as long as I am head of the peasant movement. So I obviously can't allow myself to be won over by your arguments. It's really too bad.'

It was time they parted.

'Before we leave, Dr Legic, there's something I'd like to ask your advice about. You know the story of our comrade, Hrvoje Brankovic. He had only been out a few days after two years' hard labour before Slavko nabbed him again. They're talking about ten years this time. The prison doctor says he has T.B. If they don't let him go at once, so that he can get to the mountains, he's a dead man.'

'Yes, a sad story. I've heard of him,' Legic said, and he seemed to be genuinely interested. 'But what can I do?'

'A great deal. They're taking him to Belgrade. Tomorrow he'll be in this district and will spend the night in the town jail. Day after tomorrow he goes on with some other prisoners. They'll be going from the station to the jail on foot, and the same when they leave. They'll be escorted by six policemen at the outside.'

'Yes. Well?'

'Day after tomorrow there's a fair in the town. There'll be hundreds of carts going in from the country. Also there'll be merchants from other parts.'

'Yes. Well?'

'If you wanted to do it, a handful of your men could save this man's life. He's a good person, a valuable person.'

'It's terribly hard for me to say no. But I cannot say yes. Anyhow, if it only needs a few men to do it, why don't you do it yourself?'

'For particular reasons which, unfortunately, I can't explain.'

'Not a very satisfactory answer, but then neither was mine. Which makes us quits. How about another cup of coffee before we separate?'

'I see his point,' said Josmar. 'If a few men can set Voyko Brankovic free, why do we need Legic's help?'

Mara looked at him and smiled. He felt, as he had all along, that she didn't take him seriously.

'Because we don't have permission from the Party to set Voyko free.'

'Perhaps there's still time to get permission?'

'I doubt it. Anyway, Karel's against it. He thinks the game's not worth the candle, particularly for the sake of Voyko who's sick and more or less useless to us now; also he's suspected of certain deviations. Karel thinks it quite possible that he may have to be expelled from the Party.'

'I see. In that case . . .'

Josmar stopped. He would have liked to have a little time to think that matter out thoroughly, but he went on:

'In that case it's presumably best to leave him where he is.'

'No, we must rescue Voyko. Not just for his sake. For the sake of the Party too.'

'But if the Party's against it, as you just said . . .'

'I said Karel's against it. The others just do what Karel says. What do you think of him?'

'A brave and able comrade.'

'Some people think he's a little too brave and a little too able.'

'What do you mean by that?'

'I mean that some think that the only possible explanation for Karel's successes is that he works for the police. The meetings at which he's present are never broken up, but it's remarkable the way the police always turn up just after they're over and catch one or two of the people who were there. Like the morning after your meeting on the island, when the police caught Voyko and killed Andrei.'

'Karel a police spy? Really, what a preposterous suggestion.'

'I don't believe it either. But it's not as impossible as you seem to think.'

'I mean . . . Naturally, I hardly know him . . . but I assume the Party checks up pretty carefully on a man before giving him a job as important as Karel's.'

'And suppose the Party'd been fooled? Suppose he'd managed to fool them? Or do you think the leaders are infallible?'

'No. I don't think that. All the same, since you had enough trust in

them to elect them, then you must trust them to be capable of realising quickly if they've made a mistake and putting it right immediately.'

'Our leaders weren't elected, they were appointed by Moscow. Anyone who didn't vote for them was expelled from the Party. So is anyone who criticises them. Karel is very particular about that.'

'What are you getting at?'

'At this. In the first place, if a Party is illegal' it is particularly important that some sort of control should be exercised on the leaders from below. In the second place, if there is no internal democracy in a Party, then one is entitled to accuse the whole directing group of being traitors. Since that group is responsible to no one, and since its members cannot be deposed, it has despotic powers which it can use as it pleases; it can be treacherous if it wishes, and at the same time it can brand as traitors those whom its treachery betrays.'

'What you're saying is monstrous.'

'Can a real revolutionary be frightened by the truth?'

'But it's not the truth, comrade.'

'Quite. You're here as an observer. All the same, on specific questions you're entitled to give an opinion. Tell Karel at once that you think Voyko should be saved. He'll listen to you.'

'I shan't do it.'

'Why not? You can, if you wish, save a comrade's life. Do you hesitate?'

'It's wrong to save a comrade if the Party doesn't want him to be saved.'

'No one's asked the Party for its opinion. Karel's not the Party.'

'He is for me. For you too, otherwise you wouldn't have turned to Legic for help.'

'True enough,' Mara agreed. 'It came about so gradually that no one noticed what was happening. Three years ago, even two, the idea that Karel could ever have such power would have seemed absurd. And now he can condemn a man like Voyko to death. Voyko, one of the founders of the Party.'

'Nonsense. That's not the point. The Party has given definite orders against isolated acts of terrorism. By your very nature you're attracted to terrorism.'

'You're quite right, young man. Betsy has always had a *faible pour l'éclat*.'

Josmar looked with consternation at the woman who had spoken. She was outrageously fat, with huge shoulders; her neck was too short,

and her head was disproportionately small, fleshless and birdlike. She had a thin, piping voice, as she said to Mara, in French:

'Who's this comical character? He's not bad-looking, as a matter of fact.'

'Mr Goeben is an engineer. He's also a great friend of Vasso's. He also speaks French, *ma tante*.'

'Good Heavens! Then you must come of a good family.'

Josmar glanced at the beautiful, plum-coloured velvet in which this giantess was swathed, and replied, after a pause:

'Yes. I come of a good family. For so far back as we know, no ancestor of mine ever earned his living with his hands.'

'I'm so glad. Most of Betsy's friends are not very *bien nés*. Perfectly respectable people, you understand, but simple; terribly simple.'

Josmar was waiting for the velvet colossus to leave the room. However, she showed no intention of doing so. Indeed, it was Mara who had to see to the dinner, who left. So he found himself alone with her. He had no idea what to talk about. He had no need to worry, for she kept up a constant stream of conversation, in a mixture of Viennese German, French and Croat, and obviously had no idea from one minute to the next what language she was speaking. Josmar scarcely listened, though he didn't cease to be amazed that a body like hers could produce such tiny, bird-like squeaks.

After some time he realised that her chatter contained considerable wit and was stuffed with allusions. At first she spoke for some time about the former power of her family, of the general consideration which they had at one time enjoyed, and of the scarcely perceptible but nonetheless potent influence which she had been able, when need arose, to bring to bear on the authorities. All that was over. Once, for instance, one of the bailiffs had killed his wife in a spasm of jealousy. The woman didn't matter, of course. Well, why should he be made to suffer by the courts? His wife had made him suffer enough. They had seen to that business. But all that was in the past.

'All the same, even now people like us can bring pressure to bear on the law courts. After all, the district judges, prison directors, medical superintendents and so on, they're little people and they understand about class distinctions. There's always something or other they need, money usually. How absurd money is. As if all one needed was to have enough of it, and hey presto! one was no longer one of the little people. Ridiculous. Take the Americans.'

'On the other hand, since they are crazy for money, even though they don't know what to do with it when they've got it. . . . Now

the daughter of the director of the prison is going to marry some doctor. Naturally one wouldn't let her have the big tiara. The little one will do for her. They think of nothing but cash. That's the key with them, that's the way to save the poor invalid Legic was talking about. There's no need for Betsy to get all worked up and do something foolish.

'The world doesn't need émeutes, just a little charity, that's all,' she finished, speaking to Mara who had just come back with Djoura and a flamboyantly dressed young woman.

'A little charity is not enough.' Djoura contradicted her: 'With all due respect, Baroness, there isn't a great deal of charity loose in the world. That's why what there is has to be changed into something else. Hence riots.'

Josmar had the feeling that in this strange house the inmates must listen at doors until they heard their cue to enter the room.

The baroness's attention was concentrated on the elegant clothes of the new arrival. She scarcely listened to what Djoura was saying, and even agreed that she herself had no real objection to riots.

Josmar took Mara to one side.

'Your aunt seems to know what you were planning to do. Now she's talking of buying Voyko out. Is she serious?'

'Suppose she were?'

'The problem would be solved. There'd be no question of a breach of discipline involved. I assume your aunt is entitled to buy anyone out of prison she wants to. Naturally I don't know how she'd set about it, but she's probably not as stupid as she seems.'

'No, she's not all that stupid,' Mara said. 'But if Voyko gets out that way it'll be just another excuse for Karel to expel him from the Party. He'll write: "The best proof that Brankovic is a traitor to his class is furnished by the fact that the enemies of his class organised his liberation."

'You're talking rubbish.'

'No, I'm telling you what will happen.'

'Then what do you intend to do, Mara?'

'I'm not sure yet. The escort doesn't reach here with him until tomorrow evening. Vasso would know at once what to do. I have to think for a long time before I can work out what Vasso would decide.'

'He certainly wouldn't do anything against Party orders.'

'Exactly, he wouldn't. On the other hand he wouldn't stand by and watch a man be killed if he could save him.'

'In Berlin Vasso told me that communists have no conception of pity.'

'No conception of pity?' Mara asked. 'He said that? Perhaps he's right. Have you ever been in prison?'

'No.'

'A prisoner has no need of our pity. What he does need is our presence, our support, even in the most isolated solitary cell he must have that. He has to feel that we are helping him. Voyko, now, is sure of that. He also knows that once he gets to Belgrade or Mitrovica, where he did two years and aged twenty, he knows then it'll be too late.'

The aunt came up to them, visibly excited:

'We're going to have a big dinner party, sixteen at table. The district judge and the director of the prison are both coming, with their wives and daughters. You'll see, Betsy, it'll be a great *soirée*.'

The next day, in the papers, it said:

'Hrvoje Brankovic, who was under arrest, tried to escape during transit. The commander of the escort fired at him and he died as a result of wounds thus received.'

There was no mention as to where this had taken place.

CHAPTER VII

I

Excuse me. Might I take one or two of these papers? The stranger spoke in broken German.

Without waiting for Josmar to reply he began to fumble among the pile of newspapers that the waiter had just put down on the chair. While doing this, and with his head thrust slightly forward, he began to whisper so fast and so low that Josmar had difficulty in catching all that he was saying.

'Don't stop reading. Go to Doino at once. Danger. Great danger. Take your papers, your passport and money.'

He straightened up slowly and added, aloud:

'Thank you. I'll bring them back immediately.'

Josmar nodded an acknowledgment. What was up? Was he under suspicion then? He swallowed his coffee and began to butter a roll, but his appetite was gone. He would have liked to get up at once and leave in a hurry. He forced himself to act slowly.

During the short walk from his hotel to his friend's place he glanced back several times. He wasn't being followed.

He was told that Doino was not awake yet, and was shown into the sitting-room! There he found Karel who wished him good morning with a loud laugh, a laugh that Josmar didn't care for. While they talked Josmar wondered more than once if perhaps Karel were drunk, even though it was so early in the morning.

'Are you scared?' Karel asked, and again he gave a hearty, open laugh.

'Scared? Why should I be scared? Has something happened then?'

'At dawn they arrested the waiter, you know, the one at your hotel. I'm not at all sure how he'll stand up to being interrogated. He seemed nervous recently and I imagine we'd have had to get rid of him in any event. All the same, even if he does keep his mouth shut, it could still turn out badly for you. The police are bound to guess that he acted as a link with certain people staying in the hotel, and you can bet your life they'll turn the whole place upside down. I should say they'll be after you within twenty-four hours and probably before this evening. You should leave the country at once. Not by train, it's too dangerous. By car to the frontier and then on foot over the mountains. They're not high. Three hours walking does it.'

'I see,' Josmar said, after a pause. 'But I was planning to stay for August 1. It's important that I should see what you do at first hand.'

'Why, I agree with you it would have been a good thing, but we'll send in a detailed report, immediately, on the whole action. Anyhow, you can't stay now, and that's all there is to it. Nothing must happen to you. I'm responsible for your safety you know.'

'Couldn't I just go to another town, not register with the police, and cross the frontier in a few days' time?'

'No, I can't take the responsibility. It's too dangerous. I'm sure Doino will agree with me.'

Karel explained the position to Doino, who had apparently just woken up. He was clearly upset and began to stride up and down the room. All of a sudden he stopped dead in front of Karel and stared at him. Karel said, with a laugh:

'Funny thing about you, Doino, the way you make such a fuss whenever anyone gets pinched. Imagine a doctor who broke down every time he saw blood. . . . It's almost laughable.'

'Was he the only one they got? Or were there others?'

'I don't know. I haven't had all the facts yet. Anyway, all our people

have been warned. He had nothing in his possession except some leaflets, and not many of those.'

'How did they find out about him? Is there a leak somewhere in that part of the organisation? That's what we've got to find out,' Doino said, sitting down by the window.

Karel said he would have the whole story by that evening. At the moment the question was how best to get Josmar out of the country. They'd have to find somebody with a car, and who was absolutely above suspicion, to take him to the lake near the frontier. It shouldn't be difficult. Plenty of rich people would be driving up that afternoon or evening. It was Saturday and they would be going to join their wives for a week-end in the country.

Doino too felt that Josmar must leave. He offered to make all the necessary arrangements.

2

The road was very bad. The farther they got from the town the worse it became. At times it seemed as though the car would break an axle as it bumped from one pothole into the next.

But the doctor seemed to have faith in his old jalopy, and he kept up a pretty good speed.

'From now on we'll be climbing all the way. It's a pity its dark and you can't see the view.'

'Yes,' Josmar replied.

He felt tired and without strength. If the road had been better he would willingly have taken a nap.

He didn't know what to say to the man in the car with him. It had seemed, during the first two hours of their drive, as though the doctor were being deliberately silent and unfriendly. Now he seemed prepared to talk.

'What I admire so about Faber is his frankness. He needn't have told me the truth, He could have pretended that you just wanted a lift to the lake. Of course I wouldn't have believed him and I wouldn't have taken you. But the way he put it, no matter how much I wanted to, I could hardly refuse. Oh well, let's hope it all turns out for the best.'

'Yes,' said Josmar. He had to force himself to add: 'You've really nothing to fear.'

'Stop that. On the contrary, I've got everything to fear and I prefer not to think about it. I've learned from experience that intelligent men commit stupid actions knowing exactly what they're doing. When a

man's motives become confused a reasonable attitude is an impossibility, that's obvious, isn't it? How could anyone help loathing the foul government we have here? If I were a Russian naturally I'd loathe the government over there just as much, but I'm not. For the moment you're in opposition and persecuted. I realise that if you had the power you'd be happily persecuting others. But at the moment you're not in power, and that's lucky for you, in a way. When somebody comes to me and says: "So and so's being kicked around and needs your help," then I think of the persecutors. I detest them to such a degree that sometimes I can't sleep for impotent hatred. So naturally I agree to help. That hatred is the only thing I have in common with the persecuted. Faber may think in his wisdom that it's his subtle way with men that persuaded me to do this foolish thing. I know, myself, that my motive was purely negative. Do you follow me?"

"Yes," Josmar said with a smile. "Faber has an exaggerated trust in his fellow men. He over-estimates them."

"Do you think he over-estimates me?"

An awkward question. Josmar hesitated to reply and the other man went on:

"I suppose he would have been disappointed with what I've just said. Perhaps, after all, he's right and I'm wrong. Intelligence isn't meant to be used as a defence against wisdom, and it's stupid to try even. Can a man know his own limitations? If not, then Faber's presumably on the right track. One realises that one's only limitations are the ones one sets oneself. Maybe its just when one is reaching that self-set limit that one ought to have the courage to go on."

Josmar was falling asleep. He was still listening, but the words seemed to come from farther and farther away.

"There's death, of course, but that's not a limitation. You can't reckon with it or fit it into any scheme of things, it has nothing in common with anything that happens while you're alive. You can fight against it, but you can't understand it. Anyhow, there's really no point in wanting to."

Josmar awoke with a start. There were lamps moving around the car. He heard the driver say something and they moved forwards, the lights dropping out of sight behind them. He said, stammering slightly:

"I think I must have been asleep. What happened?"

"Nothing," the doctor answered. "They let us go. It was the police checking papers. There was no need to wake you. They were satisfied with mine."

A moment later he added:

'Would you have been frightened if you'd been awake?'

'I was just asking myself that. I don't think so.'

The first trace of dawn was appearing in the east. Josmar thought about how, within a few hours, his fate would be decided. Well, he wasn't scared. . . . *We bolsheviks don't know the meaning of the word fear.* He would prove the truth of that. The doctor was saying:

'This is a tricky time for me. If I'm not careful I'll fall asleep over the wheel. So I'm going to tell you a story. The hero of it is my old friend Sandor. We studied together in Budapest. Sandor was a fine chap and would have made a damn good doctor. He was planning to be a paediatrician. He lived a very simple life. You see he came of a poor family. Well, he happened to meet Bella. It was one of those accidental meetings. She wasn't beautiful, but she was definitely attractive to men at that time. Bella came from a rich background: one of her uncles had even been a minister, but she was a communist. She came to Sandor's room one day with a little trunk and asked him to look after it for her, for one day or at the most two. He must have guessed that there was something political behind it, but he didn't think he was risking anything since it was for such a short time. Well, it stayed there for three weeks. At the end of that time the house where he lodged was searched by the police, not on account of Sandor. It seems some other lodger was wanted for fraud or something of that sort. Anyhow, they went through Sandor's room and they found the little trunk. It was quite a find for the cops since it contained the Party archives, lists of names, in fact the works. Naturally Bella went underground. He was told by the Party to start by admitting that he was the man the police were after. Then he was to tell the true story of what had actually happened and they would see to it that he was soon got out of jail. But he wasn't got out of jail. He did ten years.'

'He was brought to me for treatment a couple of months ago. I'm doctor at a sanatorium. I own a few shares in it, so I was able to see he was taken in at a reduced fee. There was nothing I could do for him. His right lung was completely finished, you couldn't even call it a lung any more. His left one was hardly any better. A few days or weeks, who knows, he might last a month or two? What do you think of my story? No comment? Right, let's leave it at that. Now it's your turn to tell me one.'

Josmar couldn't think of any story to tell. Instead he related a few anecdotes about his life in this country during the time when he had been an engineer on an electrification project: how he had found out

that corruption was universal among government officials; how ashamed he had been at first when he had to grease palms; how he had learned to gauge each man's price at a glance, what he was hoping for and what he would accept, and so on.

All this seemed to amuse the doctor, and he in his turn told stories to show how the higher one went in the structure of the government the more general the corruption became. Everyone and everything in the country could be had for a price. If the communists had any sense they'd have bought the police force long ago. It wouldn't even cost them much.

It was broad daylight by now. They had reached the place that Josmar was headed for. About twenty miles from the lake there was a students' camp where he would find the friend of Dino who was to guide him to the frontier.

They drove slowly, looking for the tents that were supposed to be on a small hill off the road. At half-past four they saw them. Josmar gave the doctor back Dino's papers. He wanted to thank him but the other man wouldn't listen.

There was no one about. Josmar got out of the car and walked rapidly across the fields towards the camp. When he turned back to wave goodbye the car was already disappearing around a bend.

He found a circle of tents, and in the middle a log fire which must have been burning late, for it still smouldered. An off-white dog got up slowly as Josmar approached. Seeing he was harmless the creature lay down and curled up again. Every now and then it would open one eye and look at Josmar. He had stretched himself out beside the animal, his face towards the sky.

3

They had been climbing for a long time. Josmar's feet were beginning to hurt, but he didn't dare suggest a short rest. It was already late, almost eleven o'clock, and whenever they left the woods they were immediately conscious of the heavy heat.

The boy understood German well, but he preferred to speak Croat, so it was an additional strain for Josmar to follow what he was saying. Also he lisped and certain sounds came almost unrecognisable from his thick, red lips.

This guide was a big fellow, broad and muscular. He had blonde curly hair which hung untidily over his bull neck. He talked without pause and the climb didn't seem to tire him at all.

The girl who was with them wore an embroidered peasant blouse and this made Josmar think of Mara. She was small and plump and everything about her was round, her arms, her face, her gestures. She spoke little but laughed a lot, a clear, bell-like laugh that it was a pleasure to hear.

Josmar realised that his guide was talking for the girl's benefit and not for his. It was obvious that he was in love with her, that he adored her round little body and the admiring way she looked at him when he said something she couldn't laugh at.

He had come originally from a Bosnian village.

'When foreign journalists run out of things to send to their newspapers they say that wolves have been seen in our villages. It happens sometimes, too. Hunger drives them down from the forest. But since they're seldom as hungry as we are it's usually the wolves who get the worst of it.'

The girl laughed dutifully, but she soon stopped. This was the third time she had heard this joke.

They were almost at the frontier when the boy decided that this wasn't a safe enough crossing-place. So they made a big dog-leg, first climbing again and then 'losing altitude' as the guide put it. They ended up in a little spinney and lay down to have a look through the tree trunks. There was no one in sight, but they heard voices, men's voices. Then they saw them, three of them, in uniform. They had stopped at the edge of the forest, exactly on the frontier. They were laughing and their laughter echoed back and forth among the mountains.

They were two Yugoslav policemen and an Austrian frontier guard. They had stopped laughing now and were apparently discussing something serious. One of the policemen kept turning and glancing at the spinney, as though he knew they were there. The boy was clearly upset, and whispered:

'It's bad. It's very bad. Those two chaps are bound to come through here. But if we get up and try to go back they'll see us.'

Josmar looked at him. The great, strong lout was trembling, possibly with emotion, more likely with fear. He thought to see a mute reproach in his eyes, but what could he do?

He pulled himself together and tried to think. 'I'm quite calm,' he said to himself, and that made him feel happy. He saw the solution. He'd have to take a risk either way. He smiled, it was so simple. One minute of courage was all it needed. He whispered to his companion:

'Stay here and keep still until they're out of sight. Long live the Red Front, comrade!'

He raised his clenched fist and realised at once that the gesture was false and pointless, and affected too. He didn't stop to think about this. He jumped to his feet and ran out of the wood, running down towards the men in uniform. Hearing his footsteps they turned towards him. He stopped in front of the Austrian and said:

'I'm sorry to bother you. I'm a stranger in these parts and I think I must have lost my way. I was trying to reach the top and get a view of the lake. I took a short cut and I think I have been walking in circles. Am I still on Austrian territory?'

The Austrian, taking him by the arm, gave him a sharp tug, so that he ended up behind him.

'You are now,' he said. 'You a fellow from the Reich? Here for your summer holiday?'

'Yes,' Josmar replied. He felt out of breath.

'In future avoid short cuts near frontiers. We're always having that sort of trouble with tourists. Go straight ahead till you strike the road, then turn left and you'll be in Austria all the way.'

Josmar wanted to thank him. He opened his mouth to do so but his voice had quite simply stopped functioning. He closed his mouth again and felt ashamed of himself as he walked away down the hill. He was conscious of the eyes of the three men on his back as he went. Then, suddenly, he discovered that he was running, when he thought he'd been walking at a steady pace. Oh well, what difference did it make? He went on running.

He reached the grey ribbon of road. As he was about to jump the ditch on to the roadway his legs buckled under him and he fell. The stubble pricked him. He lay down, his head among the sharp stubbly spikes, and tried to force himself to breathe calmly. He couldn't do it. He opened his mouth, and then he began to cry. He said out loud: 'No! No!' He saw in memory the way Doino had stood in front of him saying: 'I'm afraid for that boy.' He cried as though he were a little child, sobbing and licking the tears off his face as they rolled down his cheeks. Their salty taste brought him gradually back to himself.

'You've got a nerve, I must say, and the luck of the devil, too. Get up though, this isn't at all a healthy spot for the likes of you. A couple of years back they shot a man right here, on our territory, not ten yards from where you're lying. He was on the run from them too. Good job for you I was up there.'

It was the Austrian, the frontier guard. Josmar got up quickly and said:

'I really did lose my way.'

'Listen, mate, I wasn't born yesterday. I saw you, skulking in the wood there with your two pals. One was a woman, wasn't she? Not much of a guide you had. Why, if those two Yugoslav guards hadn't been blithering idiots you wouldn't be here to tell the tale. . . . Let me see your passport so I can write in the date of your arrival in Austria. Must have everything in order, eh? And I'll give you a piece of good advice. Go down the road and take the second on the right, the one that goes uphill a little. Go to *The White Hart*: say Sergeant Krenitz sent you and he'll be along as soon as he comes off duty. Their youngest daughter got married today and they're celebrating. They'll stuff you full of chicken up to *here*. Friendship!' he finished. It was a greeting that the Austrian socialists used among themselves.

4

The tables were set around the big linden tree, and the violinists sat beneath its branches. It seemed to Josmar that everybody was already drunk, though it was only one o'clock.

The bride, a big well-built girl, had given up talking. She shouted instead. Opposite sat the priest. He was very young and seemed a little out of place among this boisterous group.

They were all laughing at a boy whom someone had dared to drink down a huge tankard of beer in one draught. He had turned grey in the face and was hiccuping miserably. The bridegroom was slapping his thighs in time to the music, and each time he raised or lowered his arm he touched his wife's breast. She shouted through her laughter:

'He's tickling me. Johan, don't, Johan . . .'

She mopped her face which shone with perspiration.

'He's a good tickler, your Johnny. He knows the proper place for tickling. You'll see in nine months time,' a little wizened old man said.

The loud untamed laughter became general.

Josmar looked at the snowy peak of the Triglav. It was almost as though the mountain were leaning towards them, bending beneath the weight of the skies.

Lower down the forests seemed to move, their colour changing from green to a velvety blue. Josmar felt emotional but he could not have said why.

He had eaten and drunk too much. The servant girl led him to his room.

'What a pity you'll miss the dancing,' she said.

'You'll find plenty of partners without me.'

'But not as handsome as you,' she replied. 'When it starts getting ay I'll wake you. Shall I?' She tapped him on the shoulder. He looked at her and liked her. He nodded and smiled.

The walls of the little room were distempered a light blue. The wooden borders, up by the white ceiling, were painted a darker hue. He thought: 'I should never have imagined that I could be so frightened.'

The bed was hard, the pillow too high. He threw it out and lay on his back with his knees up, the way he used to do when he was a small child.

The music of the violins came through the closed and shuttered windows, sometimes half-drowned by laughter but always there.

'Perhaps one should live more consciously,' Josmar thought. 'Though that wouldn't necessarily make one less likely to get frightened. How would Doino have behaved in my position? I would never have believed I could still cry that way.'

'The people in the tents back there, like the people here, manage somehow to live their lives outside of life. The storm is gathering above their heads and they know nothing about it. They're sleep-walkers. That's why they can laugh that way. But we're awake, we watch, we're real stormy petrels, we don't sleep, we're the ones who don't sleep.'

He closed his eyes. A fly was buzzing about his face. He wanted to lift his hand to shoo it away.

Lizbeth was shouting at him to be more careful. He had trodden on the train of her dress again. He answered her and the more he talked the angrier he became until at last he couldn't wait any longer and had to start running.

The fly went away and settled on the window blind, it eyed the red fly-paper that hung next to the blind. Something was buzzing there. It went over to examine what it was and settled on the red fly-paper. The buzzing became loud, very loud.

Lizbeth had suddenly disappeared. He had no time to wait for her. He was running.

Then it was a dream without words. Josmar slept heavily.

Back in Berlin Josmar made a very detailed report on what he had seen during his travels. Soennecke advised him to make it shorter and more systematic, and to pay more attention to the Party line while he was rewriting it. Not on his, Soennecke's account, but because of the

other comrades. Josmar had to do it three times before he got it right. The final version was a complete justification of the policy adopted and a testimonial to the wisdom of the local Politburo majority, the men who used the seasons for names.

'You may have learned something down there, among my people,' Vasso said to him one day, 'but if you did it hasn't taken you long to forget it all.'

'I haven't forgotten anything,' Josmar replied, with annoyance.

'Most men are incapable of political wisdom, because they cannot understand their experiences until those experiences have become part of the past. They grasp in the second edition what they quickly forgot after reading the first. The time is coming soon when only very fortunate people will be granted the privilege of second warnings.'

PART TWO

Preparation

CHAPTER I

I

MATILDA was clearing the dishes off the table. Her expression, which had been grim enough all through the meal, became positively hostile whenever she came near Doino. Relly would have liked to be able to reassure her maid, to tell her that all that trouble was over and done with a long time ago.

Matilda, with her faded blonde hair, was in general an amicable and trusting creature. She bore no grudge against the world for having made her a widow during the war and for having failed to find her a new husband during the peace. But she could never forget what her employer had suffered through that man, that Doino Faber over there. And now, five years later, just when it was all beginning to be forgotten, here he turns up again, as cool as a cucumber, and sits down to dinner quite as if nothing had ever happened. He had greeted her in a perfectly normal and friendly manner and said thank you every time she passed him anything. . . . Well!

Relly wished she could tell her maid there was no need for alarm. 'There's nothing to be frightened about. He hasn't even come to see me. It seems he wants something from Dr Rubin. He's going away immediately. Perhaps we'll never see him again.' But even this wouldn't have satisfied Matilda. She had suffered too much with her mistress, and for too long, on that man's account.

The two men were discussing various aspects of Edi's work. Relly didn't bother to listen. Doino seemed to be extremely interested in what Rubin had to say. As always when he wished to make a good impression on someone, his voice had assumed a slightly harsh tone and he himself leaned forwards a little towards the person with whom he was talking, as though to emphasise the fact that he was giving his complete attention to what was being said. So Doino wanted to be liked by the man Relly had married a few days before.

The day before yesterday, when she had heard his voice so unexpectedly on the telephone and he had called her Relly, she was for a moment transported back into the anguishes of years gone by, her hands seemed to become cold and her knees grow weak. That hadn't

lasted. She had pulled herself together and adopted an easy, suitably conversational tone of voice. And now she realised that she really wasn't the same person any more. He was certainly the same man she had loved years ago; he hadn't changed, though his gestures had perhaps become somewhat more deliberate. She had once thought that it would take a lifetime to get over her love for him. And here he was, barely five years later, and already he meant as little to her as did his old letters. For a time after he had left her the sight of his handwriting on those old envelopes had been enough to upset her deeply, but after a while that too had passed, until now only a memory remained. All that had happened during her time with him, her total involvement in that sea of passionate emotions which she could scarcely call love so strong were they, had at one time constituted the entire world for her, and to such an extent that she would never have believed that other worlds lay beyond those horizons, or that there could exist for her any future different from the present.

What effect did Faber make on her now, she asked herself. She looked at him, at his sharp, clean-cut profile and his thin, olive-skinned face, and she felt no need to answer her own question. She heard him saying:

'I expect Josmar Goeben told you I was coming.'

'Yes,' Edi replied.

It seemed as though he were about to add something to that monosyllable. He raised his hand from the arm of his chair but let it fall again, as though there were no point in his pronouncing the words that had crossed his mind.

'Yes,' he repeated. 'How is he, Goeben?'

'He was out of a job. Perhaps you'd heard that. Now he's opened a little wireless shop, repair work and that sort of thing. I think he likes it.'

'He said something about a divorce. The usual unhappy marriage, I suppose.'

As Döino said nothing, Edi went on:

'I was very fond of that boy. I still am. I think of him as a friend, you see, which is why I asked you that question. Do you know his wife?'

'Yes,' Döino replied in a non-committal voice. The subject didn't appear to interest him.

'You see, Rubin, this Lisbeth is one of those many semi-emancipated or badly emancipated women who've had the misfortune, the logical misfortune, to get tangled up with men who take their pseudo-emancipation seriously. With the result that they no more know how

to make a proper marriage than they know what to do with themselves and their so-called freedom. And in addition to that she's a working-class girl. She joined the Communist Party to fight for the emancipation of her class. She married an electrical engineer, the son of a magistrate. That finally wrecked her. There was nothing Josmar could do. He watched her disintegrate before his eyes while he stood by helpless to stop her.'

'Do you think he's weak?'

'A man who is forced to over-estimate his wife in order not to despise her is bound to be in a weak position. A man who's afraid of the consequences of victory is beaten before the battle starts.'

'Yes,' thought Relly, 'he certainly hasn't changed. He's not interested in this wretched Lisbeth as a person, in fact she doesn't exist as a woman so far as he's concerned. She's only a typical example of a type, the semi-emancipated woman, and so forth. "*Suffering which has no general application is pointless suffering, it's senseless and, like death, useless.*" Those were the sort of remarks of his she used to listen to, hoping to hear a justification of her love for him, whereas in fact they were only intended to buttress Doino's decision to get rid of her, they were his weapons to kill his love for her.'

At that time she had been so stupidly infatuated that she had believed him incapable of suffering and, therefore, incapable of pitying the sufferings of others. It was only on that last evening, in the smoky café, when he was about to walk out of her life for ever, that he had told her and she had believed him, how he had suffered on her account, that this was senseless, and that, therefore, their relationship could no longer go on.

For several months after this she had lived in a nightmare. It was then that the waiting had begun. She would wake up with a start in the middle of the night, thinking the telephone was ringing. 'Is that you, Doino?' she would say, and it would be no one. Then she would be afraid that she had not been quick enough, that she had only heard the last ring, and she would lie there waiting for him to call her again, waiting, waiting. . . . What did he know about that sort of thing?

No, in a half nightmare desire ceases to exist, it changes to long agony. Long before he left her she had forgotten how to desire him. She had wanted kindness so much and yet she became frightened of it, for all the time there was the ever-present fear that it must end. In his arms that fear grew even greater until it became huge and intolerable. He must have realised it, for she became a bad lover, and therefore he became a bad lover too.

If she had only loved Doino as his mistress, then everything would have been easy. But there was something she loved about him more. And that was what she couldn't get: it was always there and yet it never belonged to her.

Edi was talking very loudly. He had stood up, and was gesticulating with his right hand while trying clumsily to adjust his spectacles with his left.

'No. Faber, I'll tell you again what I said very clearly to Goeben. I've really no time for you people if you won't do anything for Gorenko. That man is a victim of injustice. I told Josmar about it close on a year ago. Meanwhile Gorenko may have disappeared. My God, don't you understand? Even if you didn't want anything from me, you should have taken some action. I'll tell you again. There's a young scientist in Russia. The Russians attach importance to scientific prestige and it's obviously in their interests to let him get on with his work. Instead of which they're killing him bit by bit. They send me, and people like me all over the world, magazines to prove that Russia is a paradise for research scientists. I say to hell with their paradise, Faber, I spit on it, if they can do something there which could never possibly happen anywhere else in the world, namely, to bury a man like Gorenko alive.'

He sat down and then, to Relly, he said:

'He's been sent here for the same reason as the worthy Josmar. But we've no language in common. They talk about socialism, building a new world, freedom for the masses, and I say: "First of all set that man free." I daresay I *am* an individualist, a sentimental petit bourgeois, but Gorenko, who could do more for humanity than all that lot put together, means more to me than all their hot air. My last two letters and some money I sent him were returned, stamped *Refused by Addressee*. Do you realise what they're doing to him?'

Relly looked at Doino. It was the first time since his arrival that she had looked him straight in the face. He was calm and thoughtful, and said nothing, watching Edi. Edi, somewhat relaxed, went on:

'I'm sorry, Faber, I let myself get carried away. All the same, and I'm talking now quite calmly, what I said is exactly what I feel.'

Since Doino remained silent, he began to grow impatient again:

'If you like we'll drop the whole subject. I realise that your influence over there is nil. Your job is to proffer unqualified admiration for everything they do and to defend it against every sort of criticism that might be made here.'

'That's right,' Doino said. 'We've absolutely no influence over there.'

If you stop and think for a moment, Rubin, you'll realise that that's inevitable.

Edi cried:

'No further explanations . . . I beg your pardon, I mean dialectics, please. Your splendid statement is the closing-point, not the starting-point.'

'Quite. But since you're so interested in Gorenko, let me tell you his story. You see, I know your friend quite well.'

'You do?' asked Edi, surprised. 'Why didn't you say so before. But go on.'

Doino, with an unusual wealth of detail, described his first meeting with Gorenko. In the old days Relly had been able to tell, merely by the way he pronounced a name, how Doino felt about somebody. Now she couldn't, and she thought that he might by now have become so remote from her that his subtleties of manner were no longer recognisable. This made her happy.

'I remember him like this whenever I think of him: big and broad with his head shaved, his white blouse appearing and disappearing among the bushes. It was as though the moonlight were chasing him, following him as he danced through the woods to the music of the accordion and the handclappings that went with his dance were surely in his ears. It was as though we too heard them as we watched him. His joy was so great that I wouldn't ask myself what had caused it. Later I thought that perhaps it was for the new-born baby; or perhaps it was because Helena, whose life had been despaired of during the very difficult delivery, was living, and was there to see him dance. For many of us it is hard to master the art of being happy. Gorenko was happy and he had never had to learn how.'

'There were a few of us comrades there that evening at his country cottage. It was a hard year, 1930, and even the great hopes that we encountered everywhere we went lay like a burden on us - like promises on which everything depends and which cannot yet be fulfilled. And then we saw him dancing through the bushes and we knew, or rather we felt without putting it into words, that the Gorenkos of this world would reach the far bank in safety, even if it were the ocean that they had to ride across. Yes, that's my last memory of him.'

'What happened after that?' Edi asked.

'In October, 1930, the G.P.U., after exhaustive enquiries, discovered the following facts concerning Ivan Gavrilovitch Gorenko. A Party member since 1917, he had been in prolonged secret correspondence with oppositionists expelled from the Party and living abroad; he had

hidden in his house two men whom he knew to be wanted by the police; he had attempted to give one of them work in his laboratory, describing him by a false name to the governing body of the research institute. At first Gorenko refused to admit the truth of any of these facts, but was finally persuaded to do so when shown a declaration by his wife and after a meeting with her. He then made a partial admission of guilt, but refused to express regret for his crime, maintaining that his actions had had no political basis but were prompted purely by personal friendship for the two oppositionists, even though he knew they were enemies of the working class. He was expelled from the Party, and as a result he lost his job. Now, in July of this year, Gorenko, who had been in the "isolator", addressed a petition to the Party in which he made a detailed avowal of the crimes he had committed and in which he also denounced certain of his former friends or acquaintances whose remarks in the past showed them to be opposed to the Party's policy or to its leadership. To this avowal he appended a declaration of repentance, and in which he promised the Party that he would in future serve it with redoubled energy and would obey its leadership without any mental reservations. As a result of this document and of Gorenko's behaviour during and after the civil war, the Party decided to accept his act of repentance and to consider his application for readmission to the Party, though naturally depriving him of his seniority.'

'No, I don't believe it. It's impossible,' Edi said.

'You will also be interested to hear, Rubin, that Gorenko specifically admitted having made use of you and of your name without your knowledge. He frequently sent you long lists of books he required, which you passed on to a bookshop here. The lists were typed. Between the lines, in invisible ink, were messages for the leaders of the opposition abroad. An employee at the bookshop was responsible for the rest.'

'I had no idea of all that,' said Edi.

'Of course not.'

'But why did he make that . . . that confession?'

'I don't know. I heard it was his wife who urged him to do it.'

'The woman who betrayed him?'

'The woman he loved. An individualist like you ought to be able to understand that sort of thing more easily than I can.'

'Of course he's right. Edi should be able to understand a man betraying his cause and his friends for the love of a woman. Such behaviour is incomprehensible to Doino. His whole life is dedicated

to a cause, and only little useless scraps are left over for love or anything else outside that. He's possessed, which is why no woman could ever possess him. If ever we had an argument about anything I used to get frightened, because I knew that if I went too far and he got up and left he would never, never come back. That's why he was always really a stranger to me, why I never really saw inside him. Perhaps if I'd been in his fight, fought the same battles with him? But has he ever had any real comrades? Hasn't he always been, in spite of everything, fundamentally alone?

Doino was saying:

'No. Like all individualists you've missed the point. You think of a man as an isolated, solitary phenomenon. No such thing exists.'

'Sorry, Faber, but he does exist, biologically at any rate. Even if you have forgotten about him.'

'I haven't forgotten. Man is only alone in death, or rather he would be alone if he could live his own death instead of dying it, if he could achieve a state of not-being. And if you biologists must have a philosophy then it should start exactly at the point where it also ought to end, at the limit of existence or beyond.'

'Then the principle is this: as man cannot be replaced nor be re-created, each individual has the right and the duty to protect himself as being an end in himself and to defend his life since that life is his supreme possession.'

'I agree,' said Doino, laughing.

'You agree?' Edi asked. He was plainly amazed.

'Yes, why not? I could produce a number of premises from which you could and would conclude that man should aim at being divine, that he should love his neighbour, or that he should be faithful to his wife unto death, or what have you. All of which conclusions I should thoroughly approve. Unfortunately your conclusions and my approval of them would be equally unimportant. No, Rubin, let's be serious and get back to where we started. As you say, the individual is, for himself, unique and irreplaceable. For others he isn't irreplaceable, and that you must admit. Which would be a quite unimportant point if your individual were independent, if he owned himself. He has the right, the duty and so forth, as you said, and I agree. However, is he capable of claiming his rights, of exercising his duty? Do you know why ten million men died in the war? Because they lived, or tried to live, isolated from one another, as though they were independent; as such they were powerless, and instead of owning themselves they were owned by a minority that sent them off to be killed. Isn't that obvious?'

'Yes, but what are you getting at?'

'Just this. A man's rights, as you know, are co-existent with his ability to defend them. The power of the individual is insufficient for him to be able to defend his right to live. The highest example of freedom that man has so far achieved has been the freedom to choose how he will die. I say it with regret, but suicide is the only unequivocal expression of the right and freedom of the individual. All the same it's unlikely that you approve of suicide.'

'No, I certainly don't.'

'There remains one other choice: to risk one's life for a cause that one has consciously approved of. Men who do that give a purpose to their life because they have deliberately decided in advance what sort of a death they are prepared to die. Do you really think that such men have given up something valuable, have renounced their rights as individuals? No, they have renounced an illusion. And, if you like, that is the tragic element in all history up to our time. Millions of men have died fooled. They thought they were giving up their lives for gods, prophets, countries, but they were false gods, false prophets, false countries; the real ones have been betrayed like the men who died for them. This is the first time in history that men are giving their lives for a cause that is not a betrayal.'

Edi interrupted him impatiently:

'You think, then, that a cause has a right to ask such sacrifices? I believe that any cause, no matter how sublime in intention, is automatically a fraud and a betrayal once it starts to make such demands on its followers. It becomes, *ipso facto*, a Moloch. And there's no possible basis of understanding with *that god*.'

Relly left the room. She suddenly felt a need to examine her face in a mirror, to study her features with care. When she came back Doino was saying, in a tired voice:

'Look here, Rubin, you must admit that a revolution is a pretty big and important event. But for those who bring it into being a revolution is nothing but a long series of small intrigues and dreary little jobs that have to be done. A revolution is an idea transformed into action if ever anything was, but at the same time it may be controlled by a group of opportunists, sadists and psychopaths. It is also surely a huge gesture against injustice: all the same, during its finest moment, which is its first, it is itself the source of enormous and pointless injustice. If that revolutionary injustice is allowed to run loose, then its victims form the steps by which some successful general can climb to an imperial throne. A revolution is something so sublime that one must

devote one's whole life to its achievement, that everything else becomes unimportant in comparison with the preparation for the great day. *But*, in order that the revolution may succeed, one must put everything that's fine in oneself into the means for bringing it about. And that's the moment when it can so easily go wrong, when revolution can become an absolute as opposed to a positive idea. You see, the men who want to put an end to pre-history are themselves creatures of pre-history. They wish to smash the idols, but by all their background they are themselves idolaters.' Doino walked across the room and stood in front of Edi. 'Tell me, Rubin, do you still think I'd make a good Party leader?'

'Yes,' said Edi, looking up at him.

And in a firmer voice he added:

'Yes, you could make quite a lot of good things happen and you could stop quite a lot of dishonourable things from being done.'

'Stop things? One can hardly stop the incidental phenomena that go with an event which one has longed for for years, which one's whole life has been devoted to producing, don't you see that? Stop? Can you stop childbirth from being something absurd, painful, bloody, ugly? Can you . . . '

Relly gave up listening. She had no need to hear his words, for the tone of his voice told her all she wanted to know. So Doino *had* changed, she kept saying to herself; he was no longer the man who had left her five years ago. What appeared to be tiredness was in fact disillusionment, a disillusion that he didn't even admit to himself. Somehow, in some part of himself, Doino had become resigned. She had often hoped in the old days that something would come between himself and the Party. She used to think that if that happened he would inevitably come back to her, would belong to her, would stay with her. Had things reached that point now? Had his great passion for the Party developed into an ordinary, unhappy love affair? All the same she derived no pleasure from the possibility. Indeed, she experienced a sudden anxiety, as if she perceived the monstrousness of the ideas she had been playing with. Doino hadn't given up, his passion for his cause remained the same, not so great perhaps, but still the motive force of his being and of his actions. It was impossible that it should be any other way. Else what would happen to her? What would happen to Edi? For if Doino were unhappy she would surely follow him wherever he went, even though he might try to run away from her. *

His voice had assumed a different tone. Relly forced herself to listen to the words.

'No. Rubin, you're dead wrong. I don't despise people like Gorenko. I realise that life means more to that sort of person than to most of us. Gorenko joined the Red Army and fought with exceptional bravery. He was like millions of young men who felt, all of a sudden, that their hour had come. Then the war was over. Gorenko left the army and tried to rebuild his private life. Politics were something that had been forced on him from outside and he had never really wanted to have anything to do with them. He told the truth when he said he helped the oppositionists for reasons of personal friendship. And he remained true to himself. It was another personal emotion that made him betray his friends. The whole business could be called: "A friend and a husband lost in the hurricane of world politics." And now he'll shut himself up in his private life again, and more tightly than ever before. No, I can't despise him, even though in my opinion' - Doino's voice became thoughtful - 'even though in my opinion to betray one's friends is the most inexcusable action of all.'

Edi assumed an almost inquisitorial manner:

'Wouldn't you betray your friends if you felt it to be politically necessary? And would that make it a better action than doing so for the love of a woman?'

'I choose my friends because their opinions fit in with mine'

'And if your friends change their opinions?'

'Then obviously they stop being my friends.'

'If that's true then your friendship's a pretty valueless commodity.'

Doino gazed thoughtfully at Edi and said nothing. But Rubin was clearly expecting a reply of some sort, and so Doino announced rapidly, as though to put an end to the conversation:

'Up to now I've never had occasion to disown one of my friends, nor has any of my friends ever disowned me. I ask for nothing better than that.'

Relly felt that the conversation was over. Edi was plainly worn out. And she saw that Doino was becoming slightly uneasy. It was, she knew, a sure sign with him that he had had enough of people and talk and was urgently in need of being alone, a truly physical desire for solitude. She said:

'Forgive me. I wasn't listening all the time. Have you arranged whatever it was?'

'Of course,' Edi said, 'you've never told me what it was you wanted from me. We've had a delightful and valuable conversation, but I'm sure that wasn't why you came to see me.'

'That was one reason. I wanted to get to know you. Now that I do

know you a little I realise what we can ask of you. Which is a great deal. We're getting ready for the day the Party becomes illegal here. On that day a properly prepared underground apparatus will be a question of life and death for us. Meanwhile some sections of the Party, in the Balkans, for instance, are already illegal. They are partly controlled from here, in Vienna. They need all sorts of help, and you can be extremely useful to them. You'll be able to save many precious lives and to stop many fine men from being sent to prison or tortured. The comrade with whom you'll be most closely connected to start with will get in touch with you through Relly, who already knows him. It's Vasso. You remember Vasso, don't you, Relly? I'm sure, Rubin, that he'll be able to explain the situation to you far better than I could do tonight.'

'You seem to have forgotten, Faber, that I haven't agreed to do anything.'

'I know.'

'But you're reckoning on my not refusing, is that it?'

'I'm reckoning only on the basis of what we need and at the moment we urgently need your help, and you know it.'

'But there's something else you're forgetting. I'm not a communist.'

'I hadn't forgotten that you hate war and fascism. I know from our conversation tonight that if people like me are getting murdered, people like you don't just stand by and watch.'

'I'm a member of the Social Democratic Party. Did you know that?'

'Yes. And you're perfectly well aware yourself that the social democrats don't want to fight and won't fight.'

'I'm not so sure.'

'Are you prepared to sit back and wait till Hitler's won to make you sure?'

'I promise nothing. However, I'll listen to what your friend has to say.'

'That's enough for me, Rubin.'

'Are you going already, Faber?'

'Yes. It's late. And I have to be up early tomorrow. Usually I ignore the morning.'

'Edi, I'll walk down with Doino,' Relly said.

'Goodbye,' said Faber, shaking Edi by the hand. 'I hope we'll meet in other circumstances. We have so much to talk about, important things, things which in the long run are the only important ones. You can teach me a great deal.'

'No, it's the other way round. I've got a lot to learn from you.' And Edi was surprised at the emotion in his own voice.

'Let's put it that we each have a lot to learn from the other. Could there be a better basis for friendship than that?'

2

It was no great distance to the taxi rank. At the rate Doino was going it seemed likely that they would reach it before either of them had a chance to say anything. Relly couldn't keep up with him. Noticing this he stopped and apologised: she probably remembered that he'd always been a fast walker.

The street was damp underfoot. It had been raining and now there was a fresh breeze from the Danube. Relly closed her lips tightly, waiting for him to speak. At last he said:

'I see nothing's changed around here. The baker's still by appointment to the Imperial and Royal Court.'

Relly wondered if that were all he had to say to her.

'So Matilda still hates me. It's as if nothing had happened since those days. At any rate, her feelings haven't changed. But I suppose it's easier to go on hating than to go on loving.'

'Why should it be easier to hate?' she asked, impatiently.

'Why? Well, for one thing it's easier to find good reasons for hatred; and once you do hate a person that person invariably provides new reasons why you should hate him even more. Whereas love, love eats up the causes of love, the way a fire eats up its fuel.'

'Always?'

'If the object of love dies soon enough, the love itself may last a lifetime. Sometimes it can live for ever in a tomb. The dead have, as it were, a better chance.'

'Here we are. The rank's just around the corner.'

'Good. Now I'll see you back.'

'Thank you.'

She thought: 'It makes no difference if he says goodbye now or later. He's a total stranger. Here we are, alone together, and all he can do is to make silly remarks.' They retraced their steps slowly. Relly felt that Doino was looking at her, but she didn't turn her head.

'What was it you wanted to ask me?'

She didn't answer. He knew perfectly well what she wanted to ask. He knew that since he had chosen to come back - and his precise

reasons for doing so were immaterial – he must justify himself to her. Although it was all now quite unimportant, she knew that all the same there was something left incomplete: he should explain his actions, just so that she could tell him there was no longer any need for him to do so, that she was now another man's wife, and that everything between them was finished and meant nothing to her any more. Also she wanted to be able to talk about Edi and how he had saved her. But he said nothing, and it was she who spoke:

'When you went away that Thursday evening nothing special had happened, I mean nothing to make you decide to leave me for ever. You must have realised . . . well, that it would probably kill me. What had I done to you to make you treat me that way?'

'You know the answers you'd like me to give you. You also know what a senseless hell our life together was. You can't have forgotten that.'

'Why was it?' Relly insisted.

'Why?' Doino repeated thoughtfully. 'Why? Perhaps because I didn't love you enough and because – don't be cross now – because you didn't love me at all.'

'Then you still believe that, Doino? You still believe I didn't love you?'

'Yes. I'm as sure of it now as I was then. You wanted to possess me. The more you understood that I wasn't the sort of man to be possessed by any woman, the greater your desire to do so. You wanted that so much that you could only admit it to yourself by calling it love.'

'I wanted you to be mine, that's true, but only because I loved you deeply. There was no other reason. Be fair, now anyhow, and grant me that.'

He said nothing. Doubtless he was afraid of starting one of their old arguments. And Relly realised that she, too, had no desire to go on with the conversation. He was right, it had been senseless. The fact that he now admitted never having loved her, that was decisive.

'All right, let's leave it at that. Tell me, Doino, are you happy now?' As he still said nothing, she went on:

'Is your wife happy?'

'No, she's not happy with me.'

'Why not? Is she too, perhaps, the victim of an enormous desire to possess you which she mistakenly calls love?'

'Possibly. In fact to a certain extent that's true.'

'I think that's funny. Forgive me, Doino.'

She laughed aloud. She knew now that the vice had loosened its

grip. She laughed again, gay and relaxed. She felt that she could tell him everything, anything now, that there was nothing left to hold her back. She was no longer frightened of him, she wasn't frightened of anything any more. Now she could say all the cruel, humiliating things that she had so often imagined herself saying to him. And yet there was no longer any need for her to do so. Though there was one thing she would like to tell him: 'You can trot out all these silly, clever remarks of yours, but what you don't realise is that I love you now as much as ever I did. The only difference is that now I don't need you to love me, I don't even need you.'

She was about to say it when Matilda suddenly appeared out of the darkness.

'It's late, Madam. And you with only your thin raincoat in this cold!'

'All right, Matilda, I'll come right in.'

Matilda's indignation was obvious. Relly took a few more steps with Doino. As she held out her hand to him she said:

'Will you be back in Vienna soon?'

'I don't know, but I doubt it. There are big things brewing.'

'Your revolution?'

'No. First the counter-revolution and its defeat.'

'What if the counter-revolution succeeds?'

'Then we'll meet again soon . . . or not at all.'

'Goodbye, Doino, don't forget me.'

'I won't forget you, Relly. Goodbye.'

3

'Did you stay up because of me? You shouldn't have,' said Relly, as she came into the room.

'Did he get a taxi?' Rubin asked.

'Yes. We strolled up and down for a bit. It's a long time since we had a talk.'

'Do you think he's changed?'

'Not in essentials, no. How did you feel about him?'

'I think he could be very unattractive to some people, but I can see that he could be very much loved by others.'

'Thank you, Edi.'

Relly smiled and sat down on a pouffé by his feet. She took his hands in hers and laid her cheek against them. She closed her eyes.

'Are you very tired, Relly?'

'No, not very. I'd like to listen to you talk. I'd like to listen to you talking for ever.'

'While you go to sleep?'

'Maybe. Go to sleep and know that everything in my life only wants to be kind to me.' After a moment's pause she added: 'Edi, I've such an enormous trust in you.'

She buried her face in his two large hands, her shoulders against his knees, so that she couldn't see his face.

'Sleeping?'

'No, darling. I'm waiting for you to start talking.'

'That man, Doino Faber, is intelligent: what he means is always a little more profound than what he says. He spoke of the tragic element in history; but men have fought for masked ends, for ends that were not theirs. What he didn't say, what I imagine he couldn't admit to himself, is the possibility that that tragic element enters into his own struggle, that he too might be mistaken about the essential, the only important part, of what he lives for. Are you listening or are you asleep already?'

'No. I'm listening.'

'The day he sees his mistake, the day he understands how completely he's been fooled, will he have the courage to admit it to himself?'

'Doino won't lie to himself.'

'All right then. So what can he do? Kill himself? Possibly. He's already talking a lot about death. Or invent a new system to justify the fundamental mistakes in his old one? As I see it his whole strength now comes from this belief he has, this word made flesh, in his watertight philosophy; it holds together logically, it has a proviso for the future, perhaps it even has an eternal value in a way. Anyhow, it's something enormous. But if once all that were to collapse, if he were no longer capable of that curious fanaticism of his, that sceptical fanaticism?'

'Do you think that could ever happen?'

'Yes, I do. Didn't you notice the odd way he talked about Gorenko?'

'What was odd about it?'

'Everything. From a political point of view he condemned Gorenko's relationship with the oppositionists, but from a personal point of view he condemned even more strongly Gorenko's confession, whereas politically he ought to have approved of it. There's the beginning of a split already. He ought to see that an action like the wife's betrayal of

her husband is as incompatible with the ideals of socialism and liberty as is the continued persecution of oppositionist revolutionaries ten years after the revolution has succeeded. Faber has generally an intensely curious and penetrating mind. Why doesn't he see that? Does he refuse to see it? Do you understand what I'm getting at, Relly?

'No, Edi. I'm almost asleep.'

'Dreaming?'

'Not yet, Edi.'

'What would you like to dream about?'

'I'd like to dream I met a man like Doino and fell in love with him and he left me. And then I met another man called Edi who loved me. And it was a wonderful surprise for me to find that such a man existed in the world. And he held me in his strong arms and I forgot what it was like to be frightened. Then I'd like to wake up from my dream and find you lying there beside me, and I'd think: "Edi is here and it's marvellous." And then I'd like to go back to sleep and dream about a life where I found you anew every day. I'd like to dream that I shall always be as happy as I am at this moment.'

CHAPTER II

I

FROM his bedroom he could hear the noises of the narrow street down below. Had it always been like this? And had Doino simply forgotten the way it used to be? After a while he would come to take it all for granted again, but at the moment he felt a stranger here, and so much noise so early in the morning struck him as somehow hostile. When he went back to sleep it tormented his dreams.

Doino got up and leaned out of the window. The sky above his head was a solid blue; an occasional gust of heavy air that could hardly be called a breeze gave promise of yet another scorching, thundery day. Nowhere else in Europe, he thought, was heat as unbearable as here. But then he realised he was probably wrong about that too, since everything to do with this city was for him slightly falsified. It was his town, it was here that he had spent his youth. He knew it too well, he knew its every mood, the way a man knows a woman whom he no longer loves. Everything he might say of this city was as untrue as is all autobiography – he was still too involved with his own past youth.

He was not old enough to love that youth, and he was now too far removed from it to be able in any way to forgive it.

'Whenever you come back, I'll be waiting for you at the usual hour.' That's what the professor had written. It was now thirteen years since that hour had become the usual hour. Half-past eight in the morning, after his breakfast had been cleared away, was the time he liked to see his pupil, 'proud Dion', as he called him.

All the same, the short note in which the professor had suggested that he call at the 'usual hour' should he ever again be passing through Vindobona showed a marked change in tone. Instead of starting 'My dear proud Dion', it began rather coldly, 'Dear Denis Faber'.

So old Stetten was annoyed with him about something. All the same he would doubtless greet him in his normal way. 'I thought you might turn up today.' The old professor did not tell lies. Every day, at this time, he waited for Dion, thinking he might turn up.

Since it was still so early, Doino decided to go on foot. But he made up his mind that this would definitely not be a biographical walk: he would not build up the paving stones into monuments to honour the past: nor would he allow the street corners, park benches, tram stops to become links in an endless chain of memories, tying him to what no longer existed.

Had nothing then changed in this city? Also, and thank God, no! 'Vienna's still Vienna.' The singers bawled it in every bar and night club; it was true, that repulsive aspect of the city remained as it had always been. But there was another Vienna, the Vienna Doino loved, and when he had occasion to speak of that city he did so with an awkward shyness, for his love for it was not one that could be easily put into words.

Professor Stetten was an integral part of Doino's Vienna, along with the Wienerwald, the Josefplatz, the Minoritenkirche and the workers' quarters out in the suburbs. If the old man were to die, Doino thought, part of that town so far as he was concerned would die with him.

In appearance he was a little frail old man, with white hair that he dyed black, a heavy moustache and small eyes, baby blue in colour, that somehow stopped his most ironical comments from being offensive. The city, nowadays, had lost interest in the historian and philosopher, Baron von Stetten, though at one time almost every public utterance of his had been a matter of scandal, even on occasions when he had really no desire to scandalise anybody.

He was the younger son of one of those noble families that generation after generation provided administrators for the Empire, a

respectable and quiet family. During the early years of his career at the University, before the turn of the century, Stetten was thought to be intelligent but tactless. However, it wasn't long before it became quite plain that it wasn't an absence of tact that led him to say some of the things he did say. In his provocative fashion he would distort and indeed make a mockery of recognised, established opinions and institutions, which he treated as moribund if not actually dead; similarly, when he tore some new theory to pieces, it was not due to an excess of frankness. He put everyone's back up. According to some people he did this because it amused him, according to others in order to attract attention to himself and to cover up his own lack of knowledge or his laziness. His colleagues in his particular branch said that he did it simply to fill his lecture halls, and when there was a question of his being made dean of the faculty the other dons were inclined to agree.

His doctor's thesis and the one or two small studies that he had published aroused only a limited interest, even in the very small circle of scholars who specialised in his subject. They dealt with economic problems of the Middle Ages, with particular reference to Flanders, Provence and Northern Italy. However, as his critics began more and more loudly to complain, he didn't confine himself to his special subject. He couldn't resist the temptation to attack simultaneously the authorities not only in the field of political economy but also those of constitutional jurisprudence. If he had set about this in the normal way, adopting a dignified attitude and paying frequent lip-service to the works of those he was attacking, it wouldn't have been so bad. But he didn't do this at all. Indeed he behaved quite impossibly, passing them and their works over in silence, and worse, apparently not even taking them seriously. Then he dealt with his own colleagues, after which he turned to the philosophy of history. And so, bit by bit, he came to have a finger in every sort of intellectual pie.

The full extent of his scandalous behaviour didn't become public property until Stetten began to attack the Imperial family. At court it was decided that the best thing to do was to ignore the trifling inconvenience of his rudeness and thus to avoid giving his opinions undue publicity. Stetten's colleagues understood this, and with dignity, though not 'without a certain ostentation, they spoke strongly against his 'Expectorations'.

It would have been tempting but difficult for them to denounce Stetten as a socialist. Though he often quoted from Marx and Friedrich Engels, with apparent approval, he didn't hesitate to point out the folly of their disciples, many of whom attended his curiously mixed classes;

and he spoke with irony of the political movement inspired by Marx's work.

During the war Stetten was against the war, during the revolution he was against the revolution. He was always opposed to those historic events with which, as he said, 'a generation intoxicates itself in order to enjoy an illusion of grandeur'.

At the age of sixteen Doino was attracted by the lectures of this iconoclast. At twenty he remained attracted by him because he realised that the iconoclast was by no means a nihilist and that in his fashion he was continually striving towards grandiose ends. On various essential points master and disciple might not see eye to eye, but though this displeased Stetten, it didn't spoil their mutual relationship. The total conversion of his pupil to his point of view seemed to him so important that he was prepared to be patient and to wait. 'I shall be looking for you on the road back from Damascus. Some misunderstanding, quite unworthy of a man like you, has turned you into a Paul. It won't last. You'll find yourself again.'

'Many years have passed since then,' Doino thought. 'Stetten has no audience left, no disciples any more. He's waited for me on the road back, but I never took it. He'll assume I haven't found myself.'

The professor was not one of those men who cannot admit that they might be mistaken. It was just that he had so often been proved right that it had become impossible for him to reckon with the possibility that he might one day be in the wrong. He was fooled by his own cleverness; though he realised this, try though he might, he couldn't find out how and why he was being fooled. He had been too much alone.

As the years went by his loneliness grew increasingly complete. He had no need for allies in his battles. Was he, indeed, fighting with any idea of victory in view? He had usually laboured for lost causes, endeavouring to save from their wreckage such precious elements as were worthy of survival.

Doino remembered the professor as he had been when first they had met, and in his memory the words re-echoed:

'Some people need opinions the way an alcoholic needs drink. They believe that the future belongs to them, because they think that they own the present moment, whereas in fact it's the moment that owns them. Those people never could begin to guess how little they understand me. They don't realise that the very idea of the present is a fiction, an attempt to grasp at our existence, which all the same runs away like water between our fingers. No, there is no such thing as the present.'

Now stops being now before you can finish the word. Some are fanatics about this present; others dream about the future: we, on the other hand, are conscious of the past, and so it's our job to safeguard the future by making sure that the values of the past are not sacrificed to the expediencies of the present. The historian who would understand the past without being taken in by its legends must think of it as though it were happening now. Similarly, if he is to avoid subjectivity he must look at contemporary events in the same way that he looks at historical ones. Most people have a megalomaniac, paranoiac attitude towards their own time. To be a historian one must start by getting rid of such crazy illusions.'

Doino at that time had the insolence and impatience of youth. Yet he had to realise right away, though with a certain reluctance, that the frail, elegant, always softly-spoken old man was no ordinary conservative, but rather a revolutionary conservative if such a paradox be possible. Later he gave up trying to affix any label to him. The interest that Stetten showed in Doino would have flattered anybody of his age. But it wasn't that that attracted him to the older man. It was a method of thought, a technique of thinking as it were, that was almost unique and that yet they had in common; that was the link between them, that and never the substance of their thought.

As he walked towards the old house, low and rambling, where he had spent so much time in years gone by, he recalled the excitement of arriving at that front door, and, as though to sum up his feelings, he thought: 'Meeting Stetten was a great experience for a young man. It must have been a good experience and one full of meaning, since it's survived even the memory of so much else. I was very lucky to have got to know him. It would have been a mistake to follow in his footsteps, but it is right that I should never abandon him.'

2

Doino had to ring the bell several times before an unknown maid opened the door. She made no attempt to disguise her annoyance at a visitor who called at such an unusually early hour. He asked her simply to tell the professor who he was.

A moment later the servant led him through the ante-room to the professor's study. As he went in he heard Stetten's voice:

'Sit down, Faber. You're exactly on time. I suppose you've been picking up Prussian habits of punctuality.'

The voice came from behind an old screen covered in Gobelins tapestry. Doino waited for a moment. Then the screen was moved a little to one side and he saw the professor, seated on a stool, leaning over a large box.

'Poor old Wolf,' he was saying, without turning towards Doino: 'They nearly polished you off that time. But you're getting better now. We'll always stick together, we two. If ever I have to go off again I'll take you with me. It's you and me against the world now, Wolf. We'll show those stinking human beings, won't we? Eh, old boy?'

'What's the matter with Wolf, professor? Is he sick?' Doino asked.

'Yes,' Stetten answered without looking up from his dog. 'It was bound to happen sooner or later, since her Ladyship succeeded in smuggling that feather-brained slut into my household. They've banded together against him. Her Ladyship knows only too well that poor Wolf's the only friend I have left, and so . . . It's not enough to ignore me, to leave me waiting till nine for my breakfast, to deprive me of my favourite dishes, to give me nothing but sugary desserts or rice or other gelatinous muck to eat, to fill my house with vulgar half-wits, friends of my brilliant son. Now her Ladyship has seen fit to extend the hospitality of my house to swastika-covered nationalist numbskulls. And even that's not enough. They've decided to get at me through my dog. Why are you still standing, Faber? Have you forgotten which is your chair?

Doino sat down.

'Yes, Wolf,' Stetten went on: 'We're being greatly honoured today. This gentleman has seen fit to remember our existence and to waste a few precious minutes on us that would otherwise be devoted to the concoction of fanatical nonsense and to personal self-abasement. We must keep our end up, mustn't we, Wolf? We shan't tell this gentleman that we gave him a burial of which his death wasn't worthy. It wouldn't be right to praise proud Dion in Faber's presence, since it was Faber who destroyed him. There, there, Wolf, you vomit it up. It's you and me against the world, Wolf. There, there, old boy.'

Stetten was still busy with his dog. Doino did what he had so often had occasion to do before. He waited quietly for the professor to calm down and to explain what was annoying him in direct and simple language.

But today was not a normal day. The professor said nothing and the dog, too, was quiet, sleeping after its spasm. Doino knew that he would have to wait. He would have liked to glance at the unopened morning papers, but he was aware that that would only irritate Stetten.

Time passed slowly. The house was in a back street and there was hardly any sound from outside. Twice the hall door was slammed. If the professor was asleep the noise hadn't awakened him.

It was here in this oblong, ill-lit room, Doino thought, that Stetten had written his books and improvised, as it were, his lectures. Everything exciting and brave in the man's life had come into existence within these four walls. Those who accused Stetten of laziness had no idea of the extent of his reading. And those whom he attacked had little idea how profoundly he knew every line of their own writings. He wrote fast and spoke fast, but each sentence was the product of concentrated thought and conscientious polishing. Other men might keep their wisdom filed away in cabinets; Stetten relied on his memory.

The old man had worked hard all his life and only fools could be taken in by his aristocratic pretence of facility. What was left of it all? If he really relied entirely on himself, what was left of that reliance? What, indeed, was left of himself?

'So he still dyes his hair,' Doino thought. 'He won't admit he's growing old. Sitting in his chair there's nothing old about him except his dressing-gown. There's no reason why he shouldn't outlive me. He was too old for the last war. He can walk dryshod through revolutions and counter-revolutions. He has no responsibilities towards anyone. And apart from his dog I'm the only living creature that feels any obligation towards him. "If on my deathbed I were to tell you that I had never been in danger of losing my self-respect, then you'd know that my life was one worth imitating." Could Stetten still say that today? Was he still so certain that he had never been untrue to himself?'

'You're still there, Faber?'

'Yes, professor.'

'What have you come for?'

'To prove to you that Dion still exists.'

'And suppose I'm neither interested in Dion nor in your proofs?'

'I should be sorry, professor.'

'Why?'

'Whenever I think or write anything I ask myself whether the professor would find it cleverly enough put. Sometimes I answer in the affirmative. "Expressed by him, wouldn't it become more intelligent?" Generally I answer that in the affirmative, too.'

'Are you suggesting by these flattering remarks, that you care two-pence what I think about your thoughts and your writings and whether I agree with them?'

'We've never agreed, professor.'

'What do you know about it, you silly puppy? How can you tell how far we were in agreement, even when we were apparently in contradiction. It thoroughly amused me to watch you deriving asinine opinions from our ideas. But nowadays you have no ideas left and only one opinion. You belong to the people, to the organised mass opinion that you call your Party. Or have you gone so far that you can't even understand that?'

The professor was standing now, looking down at Doino. His lower lip, that jutted forward, Habsburg-like, trembled to disclose the white, even false teeth. Doino said nothing.

'Naturally I always knew that you'd devote your life to the cause of the revolution. The fact that a boy as proud and insolent as yourself could be attracted to the mutinous rabble – that was an understandable perversion. That you should have been tempted to fight against the most cowardly ruling class the world has ever seen, I can see that, too, though I don't altogether approve. It seemed to me then to be a symptom of a refusal to conform. But now, now! You're no revolutionary any more. You're nothing but the most miserable sort of conformist. You haven't succeeded in fooling me, I can tell you. I recognised you behind your various pseudonyms. I've read your political writings. Over there on my desk you'll find the small rotten egg you laid to celebrate the fourteenth anniversary of the Russian Revolution. You've bound yourself to a power group, the worst in the world, the worst type of scum, scum in power. You say of that ruling clique that "it was right on all scores". You maintain that, objectively speaking, the opposition it persecutes is nothing better than "a treasonable organisation". No, no, you've got nothing to do with me and I've got no time for you any more.'

Doino got up. So this time the old man's anger wasn't going to dissolve. This was a definite break. He bowed politely. The professor didn't offer him his hand, but he did open the door and accompany him into the ante-room.

'Goodbye, sir. I shall be here for two or three more days. Whatever time suits you, I'll come and call again.'

'There will never be a suitable time again. By the way, before you go . . . I told you that her Ladyship has chosen to make this house into a sort of secret office for those swastika people. With some funny results. I found a list of people to be got rid of as soon as the Nazis are in power here. I discovered your name high up on the list. Those numbskulls have done you the honour of branding you "a corrupter of German youth."'

'Thank you, professor. That's the sort of thing one likes to know.'

'Yes. I copied out the list, as a sort of farewell present for you. Come back in here for a moment while I find it.'

They re-entered the study. Stetten sat down at his desk and began to look for the document. Doino stood watching him.

'The reason I wrote and asked you to come and see me if you were passing through . . .' the professor began as he hunted through layers of drawers and piles of boxes, examining their contents. 'The reason I wanted to see you was to show you various things of your own. I have a number of your essays here, you'll remember them, things you wrote for me. They'd make a substantial volume. I've drafted an introduction to go with them. I assume you have no objection to my publishing them as a book?'

'I'm afraid I have. If I were writing that book today there's a lot I should change. Also this doesn't seem to me to be a very suitable moment for publishing that sort of thing.'

'Indeed? How about this? Do you think it's an unsuitable moment to publish this?'

Through the long and not very forceful sentences that the professor now read aloud to him, Doino saw himself as he had been at nineteen or twenty. He had to admit that the boy writer was remarkably well informed and knew how to marshal his facts; he also saw the boy's deliberate arrogance which, when it came to accusing or insulting an opponent, might well pass for true strength.

Stetten had originally intended only to quote a few sentences, but he went on reading. Perhaps he was indulging in memories that made him feel a little younger, or perhaps he was discovering fresh interests in this essay on *The Law of Power*. This composition had amazed him years ago as coming from such a very young man, and had been the key to their subsequent close friendship.

Doino, cast in the rôle of his own elder brother, forbore from smiling; it was as though he didn't wish to discourage the boy writer.

Was he the same person as that young man whom the words he now heard conjured up before him with such startling clarity? He was carried back to an unusually hot and summery March day. Made drowsy by the unaccustomed warmth, they had lolled on the hillside until the sudden dusk had descended, silent, filled with a sort of gratitude. It was during the walk back, in the forest, that Doino suddenly began to feel an intolerable longing to be at home, seated before his desk. He had to stop himself speaking aloud the opening sentences of what he wanted to write.

When he was at last at the ill-made table beneath the window in his little room, the memory of Stetten grew stronger as he wrote; he saw him as he would be, in the lecture room, while Doino read this piece. He was not exactly afraid of his criticisms, but all the same he changed certain phrases, sharpening them to suit what he knew was the professor's taste. In his mind's eye he saw that barely perceptible smile, that bristling moustache. The young man decided that he would not glance up from his reading to catch that smile, yet he would know that it was there, an almost physical contact. Nor would he have to look at the professor in order to be aware of the exact moment at which Stetten would pass his left hand over his forehead, a gesture that signified interest and wonder.

This was not the first occasion on which he had sat up working all night. He had already made the pleasant and surprising discovery that even on the roofs of the wretchedest city tenements birds still greet the dawn. And while the great city itself sleeps, the man who is awake becomes, as it were, a sentry for all his defenceless, softly breathing fellows.

Doino couldn't help smiling at the self-assurance of the young man who thought to understand the laws of power and who felt entitled to write about men of power and their sycophants with such condescending irony.

Stetten was finishing: ' . . . would prove that ideas only live so long as they are in opposition. Once they are identified with a power system they are transformed into institutions to justify that system and are thus automatically destroyed. The history of power is the history of the abuse of ideas.'

'The revolutionary idea in which we believe will succeed if it leads to *human* institutions, that is to say to power for all men, and that is to say to the impotence of all institutions.'

'Don't you think, Faber, that this is a suitable moment for the publication of these essays?'

He looked at Doino with a strange intensity, as though he were seeking to find something in his features, another face behind the actual mask before him; he was looking for the man he had once loved, whom he had conjured up from the past by his reading aloud.

'The young man who wrote that certainly meant well, professor, even if he was a little arrogant. But I think you over-estimate him. I'd be inclined to make that mistake myself, if I didn't happen to know him so extraordinarily well. Be that as it may, the significant thing is that those essays were written during a period of revolution, a time

when the revolution was everywhere on the offensive. It's all changed since then. Now, and perhaps for some time to come, we're on the defensive. This applies to the working class all over the world in general, and to the Soviets in particular. In view of the conditions prevailing in the world today, those essays, if they were published, would amount to an attack directed primarily against the Soviet Union, for the simple reason that the young writer - who, subjectively speaking, is right - was criticising power from a revolutionary point of view.'

'Do you realise what you're saying, Faber? Don't you see the weakness of your attitude? Censors with a bad conscience have always talked the way you do. But if a cause needs that sort of defence, can it have any intrinsic value? It must be built on pretty shaky foundations. When last you were here you talked of something you called partisan truth. You said that the remarkable and unusual thing about the Communist Party was that all truths were grist to its mill, provided that they were mature truths. Is that still your belief, Faber?'

'Yes, exactly.'

'What that boy wrote, is it true or false?'

'Even if it were true, what bearing would that have on our argument?' Doino cried.

He realised that he was becoming excited, and he stopped for a moment, allowing himself time to calm down. When he began to speak again he noticed that it was in the tone of voice that he used at the age of nineteen. A thought crossed his mind: 'I'm posing as the student in order to deceive the professor. Jacob's voice, but Esau's skin.'

He said:

'Wasn't it you who taught me that mankind has never lacked for truth or for good causes, that we've been crammed to the gills with them ever since the dawn of history? Didn't you say that in order to live a lie' has to be a half truth, an alloy of truth and falsehood? It doesn't matter what a man says: what does matter is what happens to his words in the minds of the people who listen to him. It takes two to make a truth, at least two. There's the man who discovers it; if he keeps it to himself it is obviously a valueless discovery. And then there's the man who accepts it in its complete form, and who can't, on account of that form, disfigure it or debase it into a half truth. There's no such thing as a "no man's land" of absolute truth. You know that, professor, as well as anyone. My point is this: the way the world is at this moment, what our young man wrote some years ago is bound to be misunderstood.'

'By everybody?'

'No, but by almost everybody.'

'That's good enough for me. A few people will understand. Therefore I'll publish.'

'If there's no way I can stop you, I must insist that my name isn't used.'

'Poor chap, you really are scared of your Party's discipline, aren't you?'

'No, no,' Doino cried. 'That's nothing to do with it. Can't you see that I simply don't want to damage the cause in which I believe? Can't you see that?'

Stetten looked up at him from under his eyebrows. Doino knew that look of old and he expected a crushing retort. He was well aware that there were few words more distasteful to the professor than 'cause', particularly when spoken with reverence. An acid sarcasm was the old man's usual reaction.

Stetten stood up. It was a strain for the old man to rise from his chair. He didn't look at Doino again, and the latter realised that so far this morning he had failed to foresee a single one of his master's reactions. When Stetten spoke there was no irony in his voice, only the gentle sadness of a man who has been rebuffed and who realises the hopelessness implicit in a resignation which he cannot even achieve.

'My young friend, you're old, yes, terribly old. You're worn out, and therefore you see fit to criticise the young man you once were. But he believed in the same cause you do. The difference between you is that he never forgot that if, for the sake of that cause, he were even once to refuse to think honestly, then he'd be finished and therefore the cause so far as he was part of it would be finished too. That's why, in spite of everything, he was no true partisan. But you, you've become a stranger to yourself. I should wear mourning for you, the way Eastern Jews wear mourning for an apostate. It's as though you were dead!'

There were many possible answers, many ways of clarifying the situation. But Doino realised that no words of his could now reach their mark. His voice was not strong enough to carry so far. Obviously a cause which necessitated the destruction of intellectual courage was valueless. Naturally there did exist a solitude which, once entered, one could neither renounce nor be renounced by. All the same, the acceptance of such solitude implied the acceptance of a private life, and such a life no longer existed for Doino nor was desired by him.

So, thinking aloud, he said:

'What if personal truths are as valueless as private actions, are of even less value than collective errors, since they have no history and no effect? I've forgotten no part of what you were recalling, but I'd rather ignore it all. Forgive me, professor, but it's not only quite unimportant, it's uninteresting. You've been right all your life, I believe you have, so what next? I've no desire to lead your life again, to find myself bound to say at sixty-two: "They're all idiots, as stupid as ever they were." That amounts to an admission that your actions and thoughts, during a period of some forty years, have been absolutely ineffective. You've never come to terms with the "comparativists", those people who strive after the better but can't ever try for the good since they have no idea what it is. You're proud that you never gave in. Certainly no one could ever accuse you of being either a conformist or a compromiser. Yet your life has amounted to a surrender, because you accepted it as it was and with all that that implies.'

'Haven't I, Dion, spent my whole life in denying negations? Didn't my work strengthen you and all your generation? Am I not a more logical and a more universal figure than yourself?'

'No, professor, not more logical. You see, you were always afraid of winning your battles. But we, we want to win. Socrates, even when he held the cup of hemlock in his hand, only wanted to be right. But what we want is power, power so that we can destroy for ever the very idea of power.'

A loud burst of laughter from Stetten, who had suddenly stood up, made Doino break off. He was laughing so hard that his eyes had almost disappeared into his face. Doino, looking at that old face, realised that it had lost none of its attractiveness for him. He was tempted to join in Stetten's laughter, but he didn't. He smiled though.

'So I was frightened of winning, my boy. I was frightened, was I? And he laughed again. He could scarcely speak for laughter.

'Frightened, eh? Has it never occurred to you that I couldn't be frightened because there is no victory?'

Then, suddenly becoming serious again:

'No, you're wrong. Obviously the death of Socrates is about the only true victory that philosophy has ever won. Plato never understood that. He wanted to win your way. He almost got enough power to destroy power. You remember how much it then cost to buy him back out of slavery . . . You talk about winning victories, victories indeed . . . Have you forgotten what I taught you? Victory in war is problematical enough, in a revolution it just doesn't exist. The alleged

victory creates automatically new conditions which reduce it to nothing. Every revolutionary movement reaches its zenith before its success. That success is the beginning of the counter-revolution, which naturally starts off under revolutionary banners. If certain people are remembered as men who won victories and haven't themselves taken part in the turning of those victories into defeats, that's because they managed to die in time. Yes, if only life were like a roulette game and one could leave the table after a lucky streak! But unfortunately, my boy, you are compelled to go on playing till you lose. Alexander, Cæsar, Napoleon, did they win? Moses, Jesus, Mohammed, how about them? And Cromwell and Danton and Robespierre? You must admit it, there's no such thing as victory in that game. And I'll tell you something else. . . .

'We're talking at cross purposes, professor, as well you know. There's no question of a qualified victory but of a basic change, a destruction of the whole wretched misery in which victor and vanquished have both been floundering. Our fundamental way of life must be altered. You've criticised it, but you've never done anything actively to change it.'

'Change? That's the umpteenth time today you've accused me of not changing anything. Let's make it an excuse to call off our argument. How about a small celebration together? That would be a good excuse for me to escape one of her Ladyship's meals. It's a long time since last you came to our little restaurant. Let's go there. Today belongs to us. Who knows? Perhaps we'll never talk together again? Let's try to recreate the atmosphere of the past. It'd be an improvement on that of the present, at all events.'

Wolf was standing beside them, as though he sensed that an end had been reached. He looked up at Doino and wagged his tail slowly, as though he noticed his presence for the first time.

'Your Wolf is a clever animal.'

'Indeed he is. As a matter of fact he doesn't have much difficulty in being cleverer than we are. By his very nature he can't commit those particularly appalling imbecilities of which only intelligent men are capable — such as assuming that he is the subject of an event because he is in a position to observe himself as the object of that event. Didn't I once tell you that Hegel was the most intelligent fool in history? His disciples surpass him in foolishness without achieving his intelligence. They've said about him: "Hegel had illusions, we have none." Thus, my friend, you've got one more illusion than Hegel ever had.'

Stetten, while talking, had put on a broad-brimmed black felt hat

and selected a black walking-stick with a silver knob from the cane stand in the ante-room.

As they reached the stairs he whispered to Doino:

'By God this'll annoy her Ladyship.'

The idea seemed greatly to amuse him.

'Quick! Hurry up before she catches us!'

3

It was clear that the professor had had no one to talk to for a long time, for weeks, perhaps for months. It was a dammed-up torrent of words that he released.

They were seated beneath a shady arbour in the courtyard of the old restaurant. The waiter was the same age as the professor. For many years he had served his meals, for the professor was a regular customer here, and he knew exactly what were the famous old man's likes and dislikes, which were his favourite dishes. Many years ago, when they were both young, they had together passed through a period of gastronomic indecision, and had even, on occasion, disagreed. It had taken years for the professor to discover that *his* wine was a dry *Gumpoldskirchner*. Gently but firmly Joseph had, bit by bit, worked out the perfect menu for his distinguished customer, which had, with the passage of time, become the standard menu, as it were. It was a long time since there had last been a misunderstanding between them. For a late breakfast it was always a goulash, washed down with a mug of lager; the exact selection of jams to sweeten the pancakes was as immutable as the laws of the prophets; the strong, filtered coffee invariably contained exactly one quarter of a lump of sugar. In winter a corner table was his, in summer a particular shady alcove. According to the season one or other of them was always reserved for him. If for any reason Joseph had been unable to keep it, it was cleared of other customers as soon as he appeared.

Meals had inevitably assumed some of the characteristics of a ritual, which the whole of the staff, down to the youngest pot boy, observed. The most junior page knew well that when, after the meal, the head waiter brought the professor his cigar, he had to hold it under the old man's nose until a nod of the head signified that that part of the formality was over; then Joseph pulled the straw that ran the length of the Virginia, half-way out and handed the straw to the professor; the latter drew the straw all the way out, and handed the cigar back to

Joseph; this was the page-boy's clue, whose part consisted in presenting the professor with a flaming match.

As the years went by the restaurant had twice changed hands and several generations of waiters had come and gone. Only Joseph and Stetten remained, and neither of them believed that the other had altered much in the intervening time.

In the old days Stetten and Doino had often gone to this restaurant together, but this was the first time that the professor had ever spoken of the days when Joseph was a newly-engaged young waiter and he was an unknown customer.

As he talked it seemed as though he were obliquely replying to Doino's accusation that his life had been a long compromise and that he had done nothing to alter its surroundings. He talked with little or no method, starting with anecdotes and then getting into a monologue that lasted for several hours. Doino scarcely spoke, unwilling to interrupt this reconstruction of a life which, though past, was yet from every point of view still part of the present.

No, one doesn't change much, neither oneself nor, even less, other people. There was, for instance, the incident with the widow. He had met her during the war, on the train between Vienna and St Poelten. Neither the meeting nor its consequences were of any particular importance. Indeed, should Doino ever write the professor's biography, as he had at one time intended to do, he would hardly touch on the incident.

In any event, he had established a liaison with this plump little middle-class woman. Close on forty, she was, in the admirable phrase of the matrimonial bureaus, well preserved. His title of baron had impressed her and she apparently assumed that he was a wealthy man who simply lived on his income without the necessity of working. She managed to get a certain amount of money out of him to invest in her lingerie business, and was unfaithful to him with a man who was her partner in business, and who was, therefore, deeply involved in all her activities. Both she and her partner were both extremely nice to Stetten; they treated him in a thoughtful and kindly way which they felt was the right way to handle someone who was obviously so unworldly or, to be blunt, so stupid. So, while in Vienna the archbishop accused him of being diabolically intelligent and sinfully arrogant, in St Poelten he was just the dear old baron, an ageing simpleton, Mrs Schumberger's sugar daddy. It was no autumnal romance, there was no passion involved. No pathetic misunderstanding, please!

Then there was another memory, as fresh as though it had happened

yesterday. Stetten was twelve years old or perhaps thirteen. It was a cold winter. He always stayed in bed as long as he dared, with the result that he had to run as fast as his legs would carry him in order not to be late for school. At one point on the way he would slow down. Usually, though not always, there would be a woman looking out of a window. She leaned out, her plump arms resting on the bed-linen which she had just draped over the window sill to air. He would have liked to stop and gaze up at this woman with her still warm bedding. But it was already too late and he never really managed to get a good look at her. Yet he experienced always a curious sensation, as though the warmth of the woman somehow poured down to envelop him. And the warmth was more exciting than any sexual experience which he was later to have. The encounter in the unheated train on the way to St Poelten was the fulfilment of the longing which the boy had felt for that strange bed, as he ran by on his way to school. Everything that had happened in between – and without wanting to boast, he too had had his successes, he too had been loved – everything in between had been null in comparison.

His memories seemed to amuse him, and he told more stories of his 'St Poelten period'. Naturally the neighbours got to know him in that part of the town where the widow led her doubly successful love life and ran her not unsatisfactory lingerie business. Everyone there knew that the baron was being properly led by the nose, the silly old fool. His helplessness and his innocence seemed so great that he became a general object of pity, and this pity soon became apparent in the way the neighbours spoke to him. Up to that time he had never realised how pleasant it can be to be pitied. Indeed he had never allowed anyone to feel sorry for him. Sometimes he had amused himself by playing with the idea of living the rest of his life dully and wisely as 'the baron', known by everyone as Mrs Schumberger's friend. St Poelten, near Vienna, was Professor Stetten's Damascus.

Or was Damascus near Gorizia? Einhard had been killed on the night of the tenth-eleventh of November, at the fourth Battle of the Isonzo. 'He fell heroically while leading a reconnaissance patrol . . . as always where the action was heaviest, while fighting for Emperor and Country.' This hero had lived seventeen years and one hundred and twenty-seven days.

He could still see him standing there, looking his father straight in the eyes as he said – as if it were a matter of no importance – that he had volunteered and had passed the medical examination. There was nothing to say, no way of undoing what had been done. His mother

understood completely, his father must have realised why he had joined up.

'I can still see him standing there before me. He was already taller than me at seventeen. He was so worked up that his shoulders trembled. He had narrow shoulders, and that was pathetic, because he should at that moment have had strong, broad shoulders. You see, this was the first time he had ever done anything against my wishes.'

'I can still see him as he then was. Death had already marked him, had subtly changed his features, and I thought: "Walter's already at the front. If something were to happen to my elder son it would be very sad. But if this one should die . . . no it's unthinkable." I can see him. Even before I spoke, that fact of his having opposed my wishes was already a barrier between us. I couldn't find any words. Anything I said would have been filled with humility. He wouldn't have understood and that would simply have made the gulf between us much wider. It was only later, when I began to get his letters from the front, that I found again the words that held us together. His last letters! He didn't write about himself or the war, or even the men he was with. He wrote about things: how the earth smelt; about a tree that still stood miraculously between the trenches; about a leaf, one leaf, that still hung from a twig of that tree; how nervous he would get in a storm on account of that leaf; how happy he would be at first light to see it still hanging there; it seems they had donkeys over the other side, and he described the way they brayed; he had never realised that that hee-haw noise which everyone laughed at could be so intensely moving, he had never before noticed the tragedy apparent in an early morning shower or in a tear in the clouds on an autumn night. All that and a thousand other things he learned . . . and then . . . "he died a hero's death". He had never kissed a woman.'

Naturally Stetten had known that in war-time there were ways of 'wangling' things. He had friends who were in a position to arrange that Einhard wasn't sent to the front. There were plenty of jobs behind the lines. But every time he made a move, the professor came up against a stone wall. He had offended the Imperial family, and a formal apology was expected from him before anything could be done for his son. He must send the Lord Chamberlain an unequivocal and humble statement of contrition, withdrawing what he had previously said. This was to be followed by a request for an interview with the sovereign, which would be refused, and which must be again requested, three times, in increasingly deferential terms. Furthermore, it was considered important in exalted circles that Professor Baron von Stetten should as

soon as possible announce a change of opinion; the country was in danger and this was a suitable moment for him to renounce publicly his previously expressed pacifist and anti-Prussian views.

'What was it you said, Faber? Something about my having accepted life and its conditions, having stooped to compromise? I would willingly have licked the boots of the last lackey, but I couldn't bring myself to retract three sentences I'd written, sentences in which I warned the Habsburgs against the war and against the friendship of the greedy, parvenu House of Brandenburg. I was afraid I'd despise myself, you see, so I remained true to my one principle, truth. I didn't take back what I'd said. And I died with Einhard. It was a death so agonising that when I come to die myself it'll only be a shadow of that other. "Officer Cadet Einhard von Stetten was blown to pieces by a shell." That's what the men who had been on that patrol with him stated. His legs were brought back. Perhaps some other parts of him remained. If so they were scattered on the Italian side. But that wasn't the picture that tormented me then. I saw him, five years old, in his nightshirt. It was too long for him, and only his pink and delicate little feet peeped out at the bottom. One night I carried him off to bed. He dropped off to sleep while I was carrying him with his head on my shoulder. Somehow the memory of his warm little feet was imprinted on my hands. I seemed to hear a strange, kind voice saying: "Unfortunately we could only bury Cadet Einhard von Stetten's lower limbs", and then I would see those little, pink feet. Meanwhile in the drawing-room her Ladyship behaved like a true German mother who'd given her hero son for her country. She couldn't leave the piano alone. That's when I began to despise music. Also that's when she began to be a boring nuisance to me, which is what she'll remain as long as she lives.'

'No. One doesn't change much. The little one does is quite superficial.'

'I wasn't the only father to lose a son. I wasn't the only one to say: "All the brilliant theories that have been trotted out to explain the course of history are lying rubbish. It's quite simple. History is nothing but a long series of murders, with the result that fathers outlive their sons. That's all, there's nothing more to it."

'I wasn't the only one to be tormented by the hope that perhaps I'd been misinformed, that perhaps it was someone else's son who'd been blown up. Others besides me, hearing footsteps in the night, believed for a wild moment that their dead son wasn't dead, that he was coming home. He has stopped outside the front door, he is ringing the downstairs bell, pray God the porter won't keep him waiting out

there! Then the steps go on fading into the distance. It was some stranger, stopping to light a cigarette. Strangers, always strangers. The world became an obscene pile of strangers, there's room for all of them, only he had to die and – only his lower limbs could be buried.

'No. I wasn't the only one. But what did they do, those others, to forget so easily? Every day there were more of them. How did they find consolation? Because they did, they did find it.'

The professor interrupted his flow of words frequently in order to drink. On occasions such as this it was Joseph's duty to see to it that his glass was always full.

'All the same,' he went on, 'what is easier than to do away with God? I'm sure you approve of His being done away with, Faber. But the need that creates God, what are you planning to do about that? For example the need to find humility to expiate one's sins and so to find consolation. . . .

'That, my friend, is where my Mrs Schumberger comes in, my Astarte of St Poelten. I sacrificed my pride on her altar. Don't you see, my clever Dion, that we're still fully pagans? Don't you see how little one can change?'

Doino wanted to answer this one, but Stetten quickly raised his hand:

'Let it pass, let it pass. It's not worthwhile contradicting me. You and I, we agree, we agree really about everything, but life doesn't agree with us. Life never attended any of the schools we went to. Life doesn't get any more intelligent, it doesn't even grow any older. *La vie – cette garce!*

'Oh, there are plenty of other things to get drunk on besides religion. Take heroism, for instance, the biggest stupidity and the most pathetic lie of them all. Men kill each other on account of it and even die for that ghastly piece of self-deception.'

Perhaps Stretten was becoming tired. Or perhaps it was Doino who was becoming exhausted by having listened for too long, by having eaten too much, or simply by the sultriness of the day. In any case he only seemed to be able to hear part of what the professor was saying. The latter spoke disjointedly, his sentences seeming to sink, one by one, into the haze of the afternoon. Bit by bit Doino gave up trying to follow. He knew how Stetten felt about heroism. Didn't he almost know by heart the professor's great work on the heroic legends? The object of this book had been to show how an incompetent method of writing history, based on childish or senile enthusiasm, had produced a distorted picture of the ancient world, transmuting the craftiest twisters into heroes. How easy it had been to destroy the legend:

Homer and Herodotus themselves had started the good work. But the book had made no impression. Everyone, it seemed, abhorred the historical vacuum that would follow the removal of the false heroes.

Stetten's career as a historian had started at the age of eleven, when he had received a bad mark in school for his answer to the question: 'What do you know about the Gordian knot?' He had answered: 'Nobody knew how to untie the knot. Alexander the Great didn't know how to either. He wouldn't admit it, so he took his sword and cut the knot in half, which any fool could have done. Naturally, nobody dared say that it was the wrong thing to do, though if anybody else had done it he'd have had his head cut off. When Alexander did it they all clapped and said how brilliant he was.'

'And so he was,' the master had said. 'It was a brilliant thing to do.'

'No, it wasn't,' the schoolboy had replied. Nothing the master said could make him change his mind. He still thought so.

When he published *Achilles' Heel*, shortly before the World War, he was accused of being anti-hellenistic. It wasn't until the war was on that the purpose of his book began to be understood. At a time when there was a demand for heroes such as never before, the professor had the temerity to proclaim his doubts about heroism and even to suggest that it was useless and foolish.

Doino thought: 'Of us two he's the younger. He's almost too young, and I, I'm appallingly old. He's never been really attached to anyone or anything. It's attachments that age you. If they hadn't murdered his son he wouldn't be so free. Einhard would have been a tie to bind him. The happiness and misery of a great love would have deprived him of his freedom. And then, too, the future would have meant something to him. He'd have hoped or feared it. As it is he's free.'

'You were speaking of change, Faber. When first we met you were very young, brand new as it were. I saw then that you could either become a man like me, or that you could struggle to the forum – that place of orators, men fighting one another to make other men happy. I did my best to dissuade you from this course. Never had any man been more plainly shown the absurdity of such ambition. You know exactly what's waiting for you, the abyss into which, inevitably, you must fall. You read your own biography before you've lived your life. It's just another version of . . . of how many thousand? All that means nothing to you, has no effect on you, and you go ploughing ahead in your own way. If I can't change you, when I set my whole heart on doing just that, how can you seriously expect me to have managed other and more important changes?'

'Do you still think I'll come to such a bad end?'

'I don't think, I know. It's as simple as ABC. If the Party in which you've become so involved wins, woe to you if you try to go on going forwards. If it loses . . . what then will you do with your life? You've made victory the only point of your existence. Any alternative is illusory. You're lost.'

Even though he was afraid of hurting Stetten's feelings, Doino had to smile. The professor didn't seem to notice.

Evening was coming on. The thunderstorm that had threatened all day had moved off. Stetten, exhausted by wine and talk, was now asleep. Doino sat quietly, examining the face of his old teacher. He had never before seen Stetten sleeping. He seemed, now, as old as the earth itself, as though he had been sleeping through all eternity, his life evident only in his heavy, regular breathing. But his hands rested on the knob of his walking-stick. His head was bent slightly forward, and it seemed extraordinary that it didn't fall all the way until it came to rest on the edge of the table.

When old Joseph came up to them, with a newspaper in his hand, Stetten awoke with a start.

'Why've you brought the paper, Joseph? Has something happened?'

'I think so. Read this. There's been a sort of revolution in Prussia and the government's fallen. I thought it might interest you.'

Doino snatched the paper from him, asking at the same time for a railway time-table.

'I think there's a train in three-quarters of an hour. Yes. I can just make it. Thank you for the lunch, professor.'

'Must you really go right away? Why not take a train tomorrow, or next week, or never? You'll never be too late for your own defeat.'

Doino said goodbye quietly and left. As he reached the door he felt that the professor was following him with his eyes. He turned and waved. The old gentleman nodded to him.

'One watches these youngsters hurrying off,' the professor said to Joseph, who was still standing beside him, the paper in his hand. 'Ruin is something that no one dare contemplate cool-headedly. That's why they prefer to rush into it. For a little one can follow them in one's mind's eye. But what happens to them when they reach their goal? How do they actually die? That's something one can only reconstruct afterwards. It's not easy to do it. It takes up a whole lifetime of sleepless nights. What do you think, Joseph?'

'I think it's always been that way and always will be.'

CHAPTER III

I

At Prague, where his train stopped for twenty minutes, Doino learned that the Party had ordered a General Strike. 'If it comes off,' he thought, 'I'll be stuck at the frontier.' His train was supposed to cross into Germany at midnight, which was the precise hour at which all workers were to down tools.

You have the strength. If you wish to use it, every wheel will stop turning. . . . If you wish to use it. . . .

Doino refused to consider anything except the technical aspects of the situation. He had already thought up an alternative plan for getting to Dresden that night, should the trains not be running.

He was alone in his compartment save for one woman. The train was hardly out of the station before she began to eat, stuffing down her food with the aggressive greed of the unhappy. Then she had fallen asleep. Now that her features were relaxed one saw that she was no longer young. Her hair, dyed too bright a yellow, made her first seem very young, but at a second glance she was obviously a spinster of early middle age. She held her brown handbag clutched to her left breast. Whenever she awoke it was with a start; her hands would flutter and the bag would fall. As Doino picked it up for her, she would thank him with the hesitancy of an inexperienced woman who tries, in vain, to conceal the hope that a stranger's politeness is an expression of desire.

When the customs inspector woke him Doino was pleasantly surprised that he had been able to sleep. They were on German soil. The other passengers, standing in groups or wandering about on the platform, seemed to take it for granted that the train would go on. The German engine was being coupled on to the coaches. Did that mean that the railwaymen weren't striking? Or had it been postponed till later in the day?

The men standing by the engine, the driver and his firemen to judge by their clothes, were deep in conversation. Doino walked up and listened:

'So this second bloke he said to me, he said it's nothing, it won't come to nothing. So I said to him about how one of his pals had said

that to me two years ago. I said after three years of it you can hardly be surprised if it seems a bit rum to me. I said to him, now see here mister, I said. . . .

Doino began to move away, but as he did so he saw a third man hurrying to join the other two. They were speaking more loudly now. The new arrival was saying something and the others kept interrupting him.

'A vote on whether we strike or not? What good would that be at this stage? Suppose we had to vote every time the commies ordered a strike? No. The social democrats say its a matter for the government. If we must have a general strike, let's have one when we want it.'

'Yes.' It was a man's voice, strong and deep. 'When we want one. Not when the bosses in Moscow want one.'

Then another voice was heard, speaking very calmly:

'Moscow . . . Severing . . . that's not the point. The position is this: if we give in once more. . . .'

'Who said anything about giving in? A general strike's a bloody serious thing. You can't fool with something like that. It'll mean risking everything. All right. But we've got the right to decide for ourselves when and how we want to take a risk like that. Not for Severing, no, nor for the commies either. They started it all by voting with the Nazis to kick Severing out. Now they want us to fight all over Germany to keep Severing in.'

'True enough. All the same we've got to do something. Don't you see that?'

'Yes, we'll strike when the union says "Strike."'

'Well, why don't they give the word now? Now's the time, isn't it?'

'That's just where you're wrong. It isn't. It's as plain as daylight.'

'Oh no, it's not. The unions don't want to fight. So some day you'll wake up and find you're living in a fascist Germany.'

'If you want my opinion, I think that's balls.'

'In any case,' another one said, 'in any case, I'd rather wake up under the Nazis than not wake up thanks to the leadership of the German Communist Party. Bismarck had his social laws but he couldn't finish off the German working class. And Hitler'll get a bloody nose, too, if he tries it. If we stay cool and keep discipline . . .'

Doino walked rapidly away. The train left on time.

It was a fine night. The villages and little towns were clear-cut against the countryside. An occasional white house stood out from its fellows as though signalling to the indifferent passers-by. Some windows were faintly lit, but the train fled the lights, dashing on into the darkness.

'Germany sleeps,' he thought. Immediately he corrected himself: 'Nonsense! For many years this country has forgotten how to sleep peacefully. Tonight decisions are being made, so momentous and so far-reaching that no one man who is making them can evaluate their import. Sixty-five million human beings! If only one million of them realise tonight what must be done tomorrow, then each hour of the new day will count for years in future history. Everything up to now has been just preparation or practice. In a few hours the real test will come.

'Provided, of course, that the day doesn't go by without anything happening. Suppose the trade unions order the workers on no account to follow the communist leadership and suppose, as a result, that there were not to be one single important strike, then . . . then what? In that case scattered uprisings wouldn't lead to a general strike. The strike must come first. Otherwise it'd simply be a spectacular *putsch*, bound to fail, a ridiculous sacrifice of the Party cadres.

'So? So one of two things must happen. Either a general strike despite the wishes of the social democrats and the trades unions. Or else, if that doesn't come off, the Party'll have to change its line. We'll have to adopt the policy of those oppositionists we kicked out so long ago.'

He'd have to discuss the whole situation with Soennecke right away, listen to Vasso's point of view, and go to the factories to find out what the workers were thinking. Now, at last, they would have to base their course of action on facts and facts alone, and not on the theories of the Comintern. It was some time since they had done this; hence the weakness of his arguments when talking to Rubin and Stetten.

Looking out of the window Doino felt as though he were a child once more as he watched the dreamlike, semi-circular panorama slip past, fields, stone bridges, scarecrows, solitary cottages and always the telegraph 'wires rising and falling. He remembered how, as a boy, he had longed to be an engine driver. Even if the old emperor himself had suddenly stood in the track and shouted 'Stop!' he wouldn't have paid any attention, he'd have gone on, driving his engine to that distant free country where justice is boundless.

It wasn't until after the war that he'd realised that that country was a myth, that everyone must build it for himself if it is ever to exist.

And the man who was driving this train tonight, he too wanted to live in a just world, but he was willing to risk very little, if anything, to bring it about.

That was why this train was running on time.

For many this night seemed endless. They kept waking up, staring into the darkness, listening to the ticking of the clock that grew louder and more metallic as the minutes dragged slowly by.

Two young men stood in the street before a closed door.

'Now you'll see. There's nothing you can do. Except yap. If you really want to act, join us.' The one who spoke wore a brown shirt and brand-new high boots which he kept glancing down at: they seemed to fascinate him.

'No, old man, you've got a surprise coming this time. You wait till tomorrow, you'll see. The socialists are cowards. As a matter of fact they're worse than you are. But we'll give you something to think about. *Heil Moscow!*'

'Heil Hitler, I say. And you'll do sweet fanny adams.'

'Oh no, we won't.'

'Suppose nothing happens again this time, will you join us? We'll soon be getting proper uniforms. Would you like to try the boots on again? Have a fag, go on, take two or three, they don't cost me anything. They look after us properly. Well, how about it, Gustav?'

'No. You're the murderers of the working class. The lackeys of capitalism.'

'Look here, Gustav, do you really think I'm a lackey of capitalism? Come off it. You know me, after all.'

'You maybe not, but the others are.'

'The others! You come along with me one of these days and have a look at the others. See for yourself. You're still so full of nonsense, international proletariat, Japanese imperialism, *Heil Moscow*, God knows what all. What's Moscow ever done for you?'

'I don't know,' said Gustav, puzzled.

He opened the door. The cigarette tasted good. With a nice new pair of boots like Fritz had he'd look all right. It was all a bloody mess. If nothing happened tomorrow, he'd look a proper monkey, Gustav thought. He'd have liked to give that Fritz a good kick in the pants. He watched him climbing the stairs ahead of him, whistling the *Horst Wessel* song. He'd have liked to send him sprawling, new boots and all. But he was too tired from arguing. Besides, he wanted some grub.

Women were awake too. They shook their sleeping men, in order to make sure, once more.

'Willy, tell me again, so you won't say afterwards I didn't understand you, the way you always do. Tell me, Willy, you won't strike, will you? Let the others get their heads broken if they want to. You've got a wife and three kids, and one of them's sick and needs extra milk. You won't strike will you?'

'What's the matter with you? I told you already, didn't I?'

'Yes. I just wanted to be sure. You won't strike.'

'No,' the man said, now fully awake. 'No, I won't strike. All the same we won't get anywhere this way. They'll cut down our pay and we'll do nothing.'

'Yes, Willy, I know all about your pay cuts. But getting your head broken won't help any.'

'All right, *all right*.'

He got up and felt his way through the kitchen, moving carefully so as not to awaken the sleeping children. He ran a glass of water. It was tepid and foul tasting. And in the bed the woman had begun to talk again. It was all a bloody mess, he thought, as he spat out the water.

'Do you remember?' asked the smallest of the three men.

'Yes. Nine years ago we were digging them up just like this. This time, though, it's the real thing.'

'Who knows?' said the third one. 'Perhaps this time we'll be burying them again even faster than we did then.'

They pulled up the bundle. The cloth was damp to the touch. They undid the knots and could feel the revolvers through the wrappings of newspaper. As they were cleaning them one of the men smoothed out a sheet of the old newspaper and began to read.

'Ah,' said the little one, 'if only we'd known then what we know now.'

'Sometimes I wonder if perhaps we know less now than we did in those days.'

'What a gloomy chap you are!'

And they all laughed.

It was nearly dawn.

That same night Herbert Soennecke sat at his desk, putting his papers in order.

He destroyed everything whose preservation was not absolutely necessary. The rest he sorted out and arranged methodically. They would be hidden in some safe place. The new day might produce an

entirely new situation, one in which the immunity of a Reichstag member was no longer respected. He didn't feel tired though he had had a long and busy day. Every possible eventuality had been already thought out and prepared against, so that he could concentrate entirely on this job.

He didn't notice Hertha until she was standing immediately in front of him. He hadn't heard her come in.

'Not asleep?' he asked in that indifferent tone which some time ago had become habitual between them.

She said nothing. He went back to what he was doing, not thinking whether she watched him or not. .

'These must all be burned today,' he said.

She bent down and picked up a piece of paper that had fallen beside the waste-paper basket. He said:

'Thank you. Why don't you sit down or something?'

She remained standing. He realised that she wanted to say something important, something that she had prepared word by word. He began to feel impatient, waiting for her to speak. Still she stood there. At last she said:

'We should get a divorce, don't you agree? We've been married for eighteen years, and it's enough, isn't it? You haven't had any need of me for a long time now. You've got your young friend.'

He didn't look up, but he knew that she was crying, in her own way, silently and with few tears. She regained control of herself and went on:

'The children are on your side. I'm too old for them. And you, you come here once a month. You know they despise me. They get along better with your friend than they do with me. When we got married I was younger than you. Now you're a young man and I'm an old woman.'

'Have you seen the papers today, Hertha? Do you think this a good time to discuss this sort of thing?'

She stood there in the faded dressing-gown that he had given her years ago and which made her seem even thinner and taller than she actually was. The thought crossed his mind that it was his way of life that had made her age prematurely. He got up and fetched her a chair. When he laid his hand gently on her shoulder, she trembled. Then she sat down.

'I'm so worried about you, Herbert.'

He took both her hands in his to calm her.

'I know this isn't the right moment, but . . .'

'It'll do as well as any other. You should have told me whatever it is that's worrying you a long time ago,' he added.

But she had nothing more to say. She was a working-class man's wife, as her mother had been before her. Workers expect their wives to age faster than they do. However, it was many years since Herbert had been a member of that class. There was nothing either of them could do about that.

Kurt Leuders made sure, once more, that all the windows were tightly closed and that his wife and children were asleep. Then he turned on the gas. He took the evening paper that the welfare worker had left, tore it into strips and used them to block up the cracks in the door that led on to the landing. He noticed the headline. **GENERAL STRIKE. GERMAN WORKERS TO . . .** He read no further. It meant nothing now to him. He wasn't a worker any more. He hadn't been one for a long time. He was a beggar, a beggar to whom no one now gave alms.

He folded the strips of paper and sealed the cracks. The smell of gas was already strong. So long as the children didn't wake up. He sat down at the kitchen table. It'd take some time. He'd have liked to get up and switch off the light. He hadn't the strength. Perhaps, if he made an effort? He didn't want to make any more efforts.

3

Tonight, as every night, Josmar Goeben sat in the room behind the wireless shop, busy with his radios. The procedure was normal: he made his call sign at the agreed times, at other times he was ready to receive.

He had transmitted all his messages in the agreed form, using the new cipher. Their reception at the other end had been apparently satisfactory.'

The answer was due at two-o-five, and an important message was expected. Josmar didn't have a key to the new cipher. Besides, it was no concern of his. That was Comrade Flamm's job. In the ordinary way Greta took them to Flamm, who knew what to do with them. This time, however, Flamm had come himself. He sat there chain smoking cigars, until the room was blue with smoke.

Flamm was normally far from being taciturn. Josmar even thought he talked too much, though his remarks were often hard to understand. He was a cynical fellow, very fond of risky jokes, both dirty ones and political ones, too. They said he laughed at everything.

'Still nothing?' Flamm asked, impatiently. 'Is your thing working? Are you sure?'

'Yes, quite sure.'

Josmar put on the earphones. The other man's impatience was infectious.

His old friends called him Pal. The Party had christened him Flamm. He did his best to talk like a real Berlin workman, but a slight Hungarian accent betrayed his foreign origin. His face was handsome, swarthy and with flashing eyes, his gestures deliberate, and his physique was one of easy strength. If, instead of being bald, he had had a crop of brown curly hair, slightly greying at the temples, he might easily have passed for a schoolteacher, the headmaster, say, of some girls' school in the country; the girls would doubtless have adored him, one or two even attempting suicide on his account, while his male colleagues were jealous of him and his female ones worshipped him from afar with a hopeless passion.

Pal's trick, as his friends knew, was to bluff with reality. He had once had curly brown hair; he had taught at a girls' school, one and a half hours' from Budapest; the girls were ready to make what they considered vast and important sacrifices on his account; he was envied and loved by his colleagues. Finally, to fill out the picture, he supported a widowed mother, and was the adored hero of a younger sister. In fact, he might have stepped straight out of the pages of some old-fashioned novel. Only all that was sixteen, seventeen, eighteen years ago. And even then the well-tempered harmony of his life was threatened.

In 1913 the young professor of Hungarian language and literature had made a trip to Paris. There he became acquainted with a poet who, still unknown to the public at large, was the idol of a small set, being regarded by them as far superior to Alexander Petoefi and the equal, at least, of Mallarmé.

This encounter gave a meaning to his trip to Paris. He had been wanting to escape from his provincial life and the poet showed him the way.

Back home he wrote an essay on the poet, perfect in form and apostolic in tone, which he published in the most progressive magazine in the capital. It made Pal's name and it brought fame to the poet.

He was invited to lecture at a club which was the meeting-place of the more advanced intellectuals. From then on he became a frequent contributor to the magazine. He visited Budapest regularly.

The war interrupted all that. . . . As a reserve lieutenant, Pal was

called up at once. He fought on the Serbian, Russian and Italian fronts. During his four and a half years' service he was consciously aware that he was becoming mature, was being changed by the war. He carried with him a little leatherbound notebook in which he intended to jot down his impressions. For a long time its pages remained blank. Then he wrote some poems, exquisite verses, marvels of expression, but strangely cold and unrelated to what he was experiencing at the time.

The revolution brought an end to that period of his life and had an entirely unexpected effect on Pal. The members of his club suddenly found themselves occupying the highest positions of power in the revolutionary state. Pal was not one of the more important ones, but after a few weeks, when they were firmly in the saddle, they sent for him; it seemed to them, and to him too, that he had always been in the forefront of the revolutionaries.

He was among the last to try, at the head of a mixed and rather unreliable body of troops, to stop the Rumanian army of intervention from reaching the capital. His gallantry was remarkable and outstanding.

When at last he was compelled to give up the struggle it was too late for flight. He was trapped. Making his way to his home town he hid in his mother's house. It was a poor hiding-place, as he well knew, but he could think of no other. Moreover, there had been several sneering articles in the press, describing how Pal, his pockets stuffed with looted jewellery, had succeeded in sneaking over the frontier just in time. Perhaps, he thought, they really believed their own stories and wouldn't come to look for him. A punitive detachment of officers, who soon acquired a sinister notoriety, was installed in the town's leading hotel. Pal, with many others, was taken to its cellars.

He had expected to be shot. And after what he had been through and all that he saw in that cellar the idea of death became extraordinarily attractive.

However, the officers, who were mostly young and remarkably addicted to good living, were convinced that Pal, and all the other revolutionary leaders they had caught, had a large fortune hidden away in some safe place. To learn the secret of its whereabouts they tortured him. Pal had no secret to tell and he underwent their tortures in a sort of sleep-walker's trance, dreaming only of a swift and painless death. He despised his murderers, drunk with a victory that others had won for them. They acted their rôle of ministers of vengeance badly and self-consciously. They were excessively interested in jewels and money. Pal spat in their faces.

Reality ceased to exist. Time had stopped as though it had never been. He awoke to find himself naked, without knowing how he came to be so, and his body felt as though it no longer belonged to him. Things were happening to him. There was an enormous fire occupying almost all his field of vision. Then it was dark again and he lost consciousness. Sometimes there would be a noise, which grew louder and louder until it stopped. Once this noise woke him up completely. He had the clear impression that he was no longer alive, though he wasn't dead either. He was in some intermediate state between dying and death. He moved. A few more movements and it would all be finished. Then everything was swimming away from under him. He wanted to hold on to something. He fell into a fathomless pit.

He awoke and this time it was different. He was perfectly conscious now that he lived. And he was thirsty. He could move his hands. He felt his body and it hurt. He lived. He was lying neither on stone nor on earth. His hands touched a familiar object. He lay on a bed, on sheets. He wanted to open his eyes. The sheets would certainly be white.

He heard a noise. It was difficult to open his eyes, painful to part his eyelids. It had to be done very slowly, for they felt as though they were weighted down beneath piles of little pebbles.

At last he could see. A sheet of yellow flame sprang at him and he had to close his eyes again. Yet he wanted to see.

He saw the sun, reflected in the mirror of a closet, and in the sun were figures violently agitated. There were two bodies, one naked, the other in an officer's tunic. The noises became clearer. At the edge of the patch of sun in the mirror he could recognise the foot of a bed, white sheets and on them something multi-coloured, greenish, bright red, black. It was himself. He could see his feet and his legs as far as his thighs, but no more. He covered his genitals with his hands.

He lived. He heard noises. He was thirsty.

The woman was an old pupil of his. She had loved him. At seventeen she had desired him carnally with an intensity usually reserved for knowledgeable women, who are for the first time afraid of growing old.

She had married. Her husband was head of the detachment charged with re-establishing order in the town. She saved Pal. He was brought secretly to her house, the lieutenant woke her early one morning and led her into her old bedroom, as though she were a little girl and this was Christmas morning. The curtains were open and the bright light dazzled her at first.

'Here's your protégé,' her husband had said. 'Not very pretty, is he?'

Then she saw Pal. He lay naked on the bed, that bed in which she had passed so many sleepless nights, tormented by her desire for him. He slept. She had never imagined that a human being could be brought to such a state. At the sight of him, she turned to her husband for protection.

A few weeks later this woman helped Pal to escape from Hungary.

'Still nothing?' Pal asked. Josmar, half-asleep, became attentive.

'No, nothing. There's still time, though.'

'Over there it must be almost daylight by now. They should try and remember that the sun rises in capitalist countries, too, unfortunately, and that . . .'

Josmar made a sign for him to be quiet. It was the call sign. He answered and made ready to take down the words that would be dictated to him. He realised at once that it wasn't what Pal had been so impatiently awaiting. They were using an old and simple cipher. It was a short message which in any case had nothing to do with the German C.P.

The room had only one small window, heavily curtained. Perhaps outside it was already beginning to be light. They had no way of telling and they went on waiting.

Pal had very quickly recovered from his treatment in the cellar of the *Hotel Hungaria*. His memories of the nine days and eight nights that he had spent there soon became blurred, and only the sensation of thirst and the scene in the mirror retained their clarity for him. He hated this memory; he never mentioned it, and he tried to conceal even from himself the anguish that it caused him.

There was another memory, as painful as the first, though this one had no physical context.

Pal had gone to Russia. There, too, he had shown what sort of man he was, fighting on every front during the civil war. After steady promotion he eventually found himself a member of the small group that surrounded the head of the Red Army, whom Pal admired so much that he took to imitating his mannerisms.

Then they sent him on an important mission to China where he played a spectacular part in securing the victory of the southern armies. All the same, it didn't take him long to see that Moscow's policy as applied to China, and received in the form of instructions sent to him, must lead to the collapse of the revolution there. He shared this con-

viction with the leader of the Red Army, who had meanwhile passed over to the opposition.

Pal took his side and was banished with him. He was sent to an isolator. After a year of this he admitted the error of his opinions and made a declaration stating that he had severed all relations with the opposition and with its leaders. He was recalled to Moscow. There he was ordered to make a fresh declaration, which he did, and for eight months he was apparently forgotten. This forgetfulness was daily made apparent by the manner with which his comrades treated him when they met him on the stairs of his hotel. They couldn't help seeing him, but they managed to ignore his existence. •

Then one day he was sent for and given signal proof of the high esteem in which he was held. He was invited to an intimate gathering of the most powerful men in the land, among whom was the 'conqueror' himself. Caucasian wine was drunk, the conqueror's normal tipple. It was taken for granted that he would go on drinking until all the others were under the table. Pal was well aware that they were waiting for him to become drunk. The conqueror was distrustful and full of questions. He was already flushed with wine, and this partially concealed the purplish-red pock-marks on his face. Pal heard the conqueror saying to him:

'Tell me, life in Alma Ata, not very pleasant, eh? Not much fun being isolated?'

Pal looked at the heavy moustache above the laughter-contorted mouth.

'No. Life in Alma Ata's not very pleasant, and it's not much fun being isolated.'

'You prefer this sort of thing?' the conqueror asked, leaning towards him. His tone of voice was soft, almost paternal.

'Is that all you want to know, comrade?' Pal asked, imitating the foreign accent with which the conqueror still spoke Russian. He expected questions about his old leader. With surprise he realised that he had risen to his feet. 'I'm drunk,' he thought. •

'No, that's not all. Tell me about life in Alma Ata. How did he feel when he was there. How did he like the place?'

The conqueror spoke in measured tones and his face was not now so flushed.

So Pal talked. Once again he betrayed his friend and leader. He was frequently interrupted by bursts of laughter from his audience. At first he hated this laughter, but after a while he began to play up to it, waiting for it at the proper moments. 'I need them the way a clown

needs to be clapped,' he thought. And he drank until he was senseless.

Later he couldn't remember what exactly he had said. All the same the memory of that night - which resulted in his being recognised once more even by those who had most thoroughly forgotten him - that memory caused him a deep shame which he tried, with indifferent success, to push down out of his consciousness.

No matter how high he had climbed since that evening, he would always preserve the right, bought at so great a cost, of being a buffoon.

Few men realised the full importance of his position in Germany. He was always to be seen around Party headquarters. He had a small office there, among the staff of the daily paper. He was supposed to be the assistant editor for foreign affairs.

'Still nothing?' Pal asked.

'No,' Josmar replied. 'Is it that urgent? Is it essential that your message should come through today?'

Pal glanced at him ironically. Josmar didn't like him. Besides, his presence here was directly contrary to the rules of conspiracy. Josmar had had to change his whole way of life in order to conform to those rules. He was never to be seen with Party comrades these days. He lived the life of a small-time shopkeeper, which provided the only foolproof screen behind which to hide his activities. All unauthorised contacts were potentially dangerous, and a man like Flamm should realise that and act accordingly.

A call at last! It was a short message. He could decipher it himself.

To FB W/27 no reply necessary no change. Over.

Josmar passed the message to Flamm and busied himself with dismantling his apparatus. Pal read the few words over and over again. He tried to remind himself that he had really expected nothing else. He knew that this meant the end for him. Perhaps they wouldn't send him to the isolator again. He might simply be summoned to Moscow and forgotten. From time to time he'd be given some translating to do. They'd see to it that he didn't actually starve.

He watched Josmar packing away the component parts of his instrument, wasting no energy, sure of where each piece had to go. He wondered if he should tell him what had happened; then at least one person here would understand why it was necessary to forget Comrade Flamm.

If he were to say to this handsome blond fellow: 'I proposed to them that we introduce a radical change to our policy here at once: that as

of tonight we should act solidly in concert with the social democrats and the trades unionists; that leaving all polemics aside we should make a sincere common front with them against the enemy. They turned down my proposition with the words *no change*. So we're headed inevitably for a smash. If they'd agreed we might still have been able to save everything.' Pal wondered what the faithful Goeben would have replied to that; probably, 'Our line is the right one. It can't suddenly have become wrong. Therefore, why change it?' Then Pal would have had to admit that he'd been brave too late, much too late, that he'd been a coward for too long. So, he thought, he wasn't entitled to sympathy any more. He set fire to the little piece of paper and watched it burning in the ash-tray.

'Listen. What's that?' Josmar asked.

They both listened to the noise, faint at first, then growing louder, then rapidly fading away. It came out of the ground beneath them.

'That,' said Flamm in a tone of indifference, 'is the subway.'

'What does that mean then? They're not striking? Our influence among the subway workers is particularly strong.'

'Ah? So . . . ?'

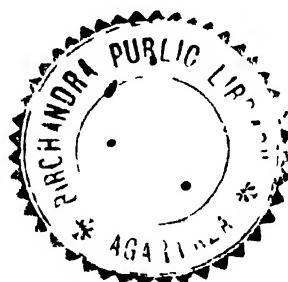
'Ah? So . . . ?' Josmar mimicked him. 'Have you forgotten that the general strike was ordered for today?'

Pal was tempted to laugh in his face. But when he looked at him he suddenly felt pity for Josmar. Crumpling the ashes of the burned paper between forefinger and thumb, he suddenly seemed to see hundreds, thousands, of young men like this one, their eyelids glued together by their own blood, without willpower, caught in the shadowy zone between life and death. Today they were still standing upright, the men of the German Communist Party, the strongest wing of the Communist International, six million voters. But for him their faces were already beaten and bloody.

All at once he felt an intolerable thirst.

'Come on, Goeben, let's go and have a drink.'

He was in a great hurry.



CHAPTER IV

I

Now everything was happening at lunatic speed. Beneath the impassive gaze of the footmen a pair of perfectly pressed white flannel trousers, terminating in a pair of white shoes, came down the wide staircase, stepping daintily on the expensive carpet. The man jumped into a car and was gone. There was the hum of an engine, and he had arrived. He leaped out of the car, took a few steps, and climbed into an aeroplane which immediately took off. Then it was night with an orchestra playing. At first the moon was hidden behind clouds, but they parted to reveal a glittering sea. On it sailed a large yacht, the music of Hawaiian guitars coming from the bridge. The girl leaned against the rails, singing to the accompaniment of the guitars, her sad eyes raised towards the sky. The aeroplane circled the yacht. From it there dangled a rope and down the rope came the man in white flannels. Dauntless he jumped, landing on deck immediately in front of the singer. She crooned on, a tear glistening in either eye. As she stopped for breath the man took up the tune and finished the song. Then they sank into an endless embrace. Their faces could no longer be seen, only the tops of their heads. Despite everything not one hair of her elaborate coiffure was out of place, nor was the crease in his trousers in any way the worse for wear. As they kissed the hall lit up. Everything faded away. Behind the screen, now blankly white, the guitars played on for a minute or two.

The crowd pushed them sluggishly towards the exit. The night air tasted good. Vasso and Mara smiled as they glanced at the posters of this highly successful film. In the blue light with which the front of the cinema was illuminated, Doino thought that they looked unreal. They separated right away. Doino had to go to bed.

He didn't want to sleep, he didn't even feel particularly tired. But having been awake for so long he had become hypersensitive to noise. He took a detour through quiet back streets, sitting down to rest for a moment on a bench in a little park. He didn't want to think so he hummed a tune to himself.

Opening the apartment door he saw at once that the light was on in

Gerda's bedroom. Nothing unusual in that. He assumed she'd tried to read in bed and had fallen asleep, after a few minutes, with the book in her hand. She was beautiful lying there, with her long, sunburned legs; her breasts and stomach, where the top of her pyjamas had fallen open, were oddly white in contrast to the rest of her body.

She had doubtless imagined that the political situation would bring him back to Berlin. Otherwise she wouldn't be sleeping here in his apartment waiting for him. Yet, if she had stayed awake, he could still have explained nothing about what he felt to her. In his life their friendship was, as it were, something extraterritorial. She read what he wrote with an interest that derived from him rather than from what was important to him. She had for a long time believed in God, now she believed that she was an unbeliever. All the same he knew that he was really a stranger to her, a foreign being, in contact with her only through that small portion of his emotions which he devoted to her.

He let her sleep.

His study hadn't been tidied since he left. In there he felt alone at last, at home.

'Whether you take the train next week or never, you'll still be in time for your own defeat,' Stetten had said. All the same, Doino somehow felt that he'd arrived too late. Even though he knew that had he been there all along, not one tiny detail would have been changed. The decision hadn't been made here. The people here merely carried out the orders they received. Moscow should have ordered a reversal of policy, yesterday at the latest.

Here the only competent member of the local Politburo was Soennecke, and he was being increasingly eclipsed. He had now an international job for which he wasn't equipped. If it weren't for election meetings and propaganda the German workers would soon have forgotten their best man.

Take Classen, for example: a good fellow, but second-rate. Things would have turned out very differently if, back in 1923, Classen and his people hadn't been left alone. There were men like Classen in every town who would have fought as well as he did. Yet he was the only one to receive advancement in the Party as a result of the defeat, because he was the only one who actually had fought. Little by little he'd forgotten that this was his only claim to fame, and now he was the leader. From every poster his clear eyes, beneath the vizor of his inevitable cap, gazed at the electors, inspiring confidence by their palpable honesty.

During the discussion with Classen, Soennecke and Flamm, in the

little editorial office, Doino had kept thinking: 'What a wonderful district leader Classen would have made, provided the district weren't too big.' It was too late even for that. As soon as any serious problem was raised Classen stopped talking normally and launched into a sort of slick and colourless journalistic jargon which seemed to Doino somehow to typify his impotence, though at the moment he couldn't tell why he felt like this. During the discussion Classen had said at one point:

'We can only carry out the preparations for carrying out the revolution after we've carried out our exposure of the treachery behind the Social Democrat Party.'

At the word treachery he banged on the table, as though he realised the weakness of what he was saying. Doino had an amusing idea: 'A party leadership that's forgotten all verbs except "to carry out" and uses that only to string together a series of abstract nouns, will never succeed in carrying out any revolution or the exposure of any sort of treachery.' Moreover, despite the fact that it was still early in the morning, Classen had already had a considerable amount to drink. Those celebrated eyes, so large and clear, were disagreeably poppy.

Soennecke was busy reading the reports that Doino had brought and scarcely took part in the conversation. On the other hand Flamm, who was generally so facetious, a Grey Eminence in the disguise of pantaloons, was totally serious today. When Classen asked Doino pointedly:

'How about you? What do you think?' Flamm interrupted with:

'In any event, the Party line is absolutely correct. We were right to order a general strike. We've seized an opportunity of showing the German workers that the social democrats and the trades unions are allied with fascism to the bitter end. The events of today are a striking proof of the absolute correctness of our policy and we'll carry out our electoral campaign on that basis, carry it out, Faber, carry it out, I say.'

To which Doino replied:

'And while the Nazis gain another two or three million votes we'll carry out an increase in Party strength of at least five thousand. . . .'

Sonnecke looked up and said irritably:

'Drop this carrying out stuff.'

Classen, who lost his self-assurance as soon as he felt that he was in any way out of his depth, left the room.

'What's the matter with you, Pal?' Doino asked. 'Usually the jokes of the Rabbi Salomon in your witty paper *Az Ojsag* are good enough for you. What's got into you today . . . ?'

Pal interrupted him impatiently:

'What's that?'

Doino looked at him. Suddenly he saw it all. Pal was beginning to repent what he'd done. He's said something against the Party line and was compromised in the highest circles.

'It's as bad as that, is it Pal?' he asked softly.

'It couldn't be much worse.'

'How much longer do you expect us to last?'

'Three months, maybe six, not more.'

'And then?'

Pal didn't answer. He began sorting papers. He knew he might well be recalled tomorrow.

'Come along. There's one thing we can carry out: let's go and eat.'

They both smiled, but not at the joke which already seemed stale to both of them.

Before leaving the building they read the latest reports from all over the country. Nowhere had there been one single strike of any importance. Pal said:

'We'll report that the subordinate leaders failed to grasp what they were supposed to do.'

This was the formula, now in use for several years, by which the Party leadership explained away its failures. This formula was the epitome of 'bolshevist self-criticism'. The Party line was – inevitably – correct; the tactical measures employed were – inevitably – the right ones, everything was – invariably – excellent, superb. Yet, somehow the Party didn't go on from success to success. Alas! 'The subordinate leaders had failed to grasp what they were supposed to do.'

2

Doino would have liked to blot out from his mind the many encounters of this overlong July day. He tried to read but he couldn't concentrate, so he gave up the attempt. There was no alternative but to think it all out and thus to suffer twice, the way one suffers in memory for a youthful humiliation.

Pal had said:

'We'll say that the subordinate leaders failed to grasp what they were supposed to do.'

The leader of the Party cell in the Motor Works was just such a subordinate leader. Doino had caught him at the gate of the factory.

The man had said:

'It's not going badly, but it's not going well either.'

He seemed exhausted; he'd doubtless spend the whole of last night in conference.

'What do you mean by that?'

'My people are saying the Party's right and the time's come now when we've got to do something. But if our factory goes on strike on its own, it doesn't make any sense. They say let's go through thick and thin together . . . but on our own, it doesn't make any sense.'

'Suppose each group felt that way? After all, somebody's got to start it. And if your factory, where we're particularly strong won't come out. . . .

'I know . . .,' the man said exhaustedly, shutting for a moment his red-rimmed eyes. 'That's exactly what we've told them. But what do you expect to happen, comrade? A general strike's out of the question if the trade union leaders are against it. Here, this is one of their leaflets. They've been handing them out all over the place. Have a look at it.'

Doino glanced at the sheet of paper: ' . . . don't let yourselves be provoked into action . . . the German working man, fully conscious of his rights, is a law-abiding citizen. . . . However, if in the future it should ever prove unavoidable, we fight to the last man for . . . look out for communist provocation. . . .

There was a long blast on the factory whistle. The day's work began. The comrade had rejoined Doino.

'The workers' committee has just made a decision. They'll go into the factory, but there'll be no work done until nine o'clock. Then if the others strike we'll go out too; if they don't, we go back to work. We're discussing the situation with men from the other factories now,' and with that the comrade disappeared into the factory courtyard.

This inexhaustible 'subordinate leader', ready to make any sacrifice, had understood the situation as clearly as had Pal.

And then there were the unemployed outside the Electrical Factory. They had come to urge the workers there to strike. The reasons they gave, true so far as they themselves were concerned, seemed poor and even suspect to men who still had a job to lose.

These men, standing in a group outside the factory gates, were sickly, pale and emaciated; they spoke disjointedly, as men do when they have long not eaten enough. How could they know that their appearance alone cancelled out their arguments? At the sight of these unemployed the workers forgot all about Papen and Severing, thinking only: 'At all costs I must never get to be like them, to look like these men.'

For Vasso, apparently, it was all just another proof of his own farsightedness and of nothing more.

Now that Mara was with him he had become calmer, and his homesickness was for a time forgotten.

'Homesick? Homesick? Can you imagine Lenin being homesick when *he* was in exile?' Soennecke had once asked.

And Vasso had replied:

'It's possible. You'd understand better if you'd ever been a refugee yourself.'

'I'd never become a refugee,' Soennecke had said abruptly, almost as though he were offended. 'Never, no matter what happened.'

'So the guards die but don't surrender?' Vasso quoted in a mocking tone.

'That's right,' Soennecke answered.

'In the old days revolutionaries fell to the cry of: "Long live the world revolution!" Nowadays, when they're shot without warning, "while attempting to escape," they die with the word "maiku" on their lips, that is to say, crying "Mother". They don't die like fighters, but like little children caught up in a bad fairy story or in a nightmare.'

'Soldiers die that way, too. Even in an attack death is always a surprise. Since it's unexpected it makes you feel like a defenceless child again.'

For a moment Doino wondered what it would be like if, merely by so wishing, he could make all this unimportant for him.

Sonnecke was a good man, and he'd have made a good leader if they'd let him. For obscure reasons he was pushed into the shadows. He accepted this with bowed head.

'Why should I care about a man who gives in as easily as this, an obedient rebel? I accused Stetten of being too willing to accept life as it came; how much more should I accuse Soennecke?'

'And take Vasso. No one had less self-deception in his make-up. No one sees what's happening more clearly than he. The Party he helped to found is going to the dogs; he himself is increasingly put aside, increasingly isolated, and he accepts it.'

'And Pal. And Mara. And so many others. They're members of a conspiracy of silence, of silence to conceal the truth.'

Then Doino realised that he too had joined that conspiracy. He, too, was silent. He, too, didn't come out with the truth.

At the age of nineteen the Doino who was Stetten's pupil wouldn't have remained silent; he wouldn't have justified not speaking with the

excuse that he was obeying a discipline essential for the coming struggle.

Doino wondered if perhaps the younger man was right and the older wrong.

'We don't care about being right: we want power,' he had said in reply to Stetten's ironies.

However, Doino in no way desired that power for his own use. He had never forgotten the fact which he understood so clearly at nineteen: that power corrupts, and that, therefore, the man who has it inevitably misuses it.

So did he really want power for men like Soennecke? It would soon be snatched from them by men of Classen's type. Did he want power for the workers who'd refused to strike today?

Why did he so hate the past, that past that lingered on into the present?

He gave up this banal dialogue with himself. He could say nothing tonight that would be worth listening to.

The past? He saw himself as he had once been.

He was six or perhaps seven years old, and the crusty snow crackled beneath his fur-lined boots. The uppers were shiny black and when he leaned over he could see his reflection in their polished surface. He walked through the town until he came to a sledge. The peasant on the box was asleep, his sheepskin cap pulled low over his eyes. His moustache was stiff and white with frost. The boy stood and stared at the sleeping Ukrainian. Why had he stood there like that? And why, now that he was grown up, did he remember that scene?

When the wind moaned they used to say: 'It's the Czar hanging an innocent man.' And the boy used to ask: 'Do they let him do that?'

The wind often moaned, and so the child often thought about the Czar. He had formed a clear image of what the Czar must look like. But as for the hanged innocents . . . they were everyone else in the world and there was no need to imagine them.

When the Messiah came it would be all different. No, no one knew exactly when he would come. But it might be at any time. Therefore, one must live every minute of one's life in such a way as to be prepared for His coming.

That was all one could do, the little Jew learned, to help on the deliverance of God and of His world. One must wait.

The boy didn't like waiting. That was the beginning of the end of his childhood. And now, decades later, his childhood was there again

before him. A little boy in fur boots stared at a sleeping peasant whose moustache was white and frozen stiff.

Stetten would have added: 'And the man who ended his childhood because he wouldn't await the Messiah awaits today a new Messiah, only now he calls him "world revolution" or perhaps "a classless society". Nothing changes, my dear Dion.'

Doino reached for the dictaphone and inserted a new cylinder. He'd answer Stetten's remarks and at the same time answer much else too. As he put the mouthpiece to his lips he saw the little old man, orphaned by the death of his son. He was the only man on this earth who neither awaited nor wanted deliverance. He would defy the misery of life until life itself had done with him.

3

Gerda had heard him open the door. The noise of the key in the lock had awakened her. She wanted him to wake her, which was why she had pretended to be asleep. She was conscious of his nearness as he stood looking at her. She heard him leave the room on tiptoe.

Then she was wide awake. She waited. From time to time she heard him move, settling into his armchair: he didn't get up, he didn't come to her. She listened. Time passed so slowly that whole unbearably long minutes seemed to elapse between each of her pulse beats.

Since being with Doino she'd learned how to wait. Now she realised that no woman can ever become resigned to waiting for a man whose love seems uncertain the moment he has left her bed.

Gerda, twenty-four years old, had loved before and had been much loved herself. Yet she didn't understand what it was in Doino that attracted her so irresistibly. When they were together she was sure he didn't love her. Yet she was equally certain that one day, quite suddenly perhaps, that would change, surprising both of them. Then the stranger in him would be gone and he would say to her: 'I love you.' Then he would belong to her for ever.

Sometimes she felt sorry for him. She would imagine that he fell sick, that all his friends had deserted him and that even his ex-wife would do nothing for him. She alone stayed faithful and saved him.

After a long and appalling sickness Denis had gone blind. But she, Gerda, stayed with him; she looked after him so courageously that people gazed after her in the street, amazed by her happy expression

as she walked proudly beside him; her sturdy hand would guide him through the streets, or, to be more exact, through life.

Sometimes, during the lunch hour when she was resting on a park bench, she would imagine a scene more exciting for her than any erotic fantasy. Invariably she would be wearing a dark blue tailor-made suit and a white blouse. It was wonderful. It was always early autumn. They were walking or rather wandering down a long alley of conifers and she whispered softly: 'Lord, the hour has struck. The summer was too long.' And Denis laughed; he was very happy.

But now, while waiting for Denis to get up and come to her, she found she couldn't conjure up that scene.

Her feet were cold. She wanted to reach for the blanket that lay on the chair by the bed, but she didn't move. Deliberately she lay still. To such an extent did Denis influence her that every gesture of hers was connected with him.

She was jealous of the other girls' happiness in the big law office where she worked. They all seemed so radiant at the beginning of each week. But when she listened to their talk her jealousy turned to something like shame. Then she would decide that after all she was happier than all the rest. . . .

She heard him stub out a cigarette and light another. She hated him and she hated the happiness that made her feel so proud. It was the same contemptible happiness that her mother found in marriage. Since her early youth she had treated her mother more like a younger sister, and had despised her happiness and her love for that man whom she herself could hardly tolerate for a father.

He was too tall, her father, too broad, and for a regular officer too fat. Her mother was a frail and pathetically thin woman. It was obvious after a glance at them that she had devoted her whole life to her husband. She had become a protestant, much against the wishes of her catholic family, in order to marry this allegedly Bavarian protestant. That was the beginning. Whenever anything went wrong for this officer in the predominantly catholic Bavarian Army, she accepted it as being her responsibility. With the physique of a consumptive girl, she had devoted her life to carrying this lump of a husband on her narrow shoulders. And that wasn't all.

Gerda's father had expected great things from the war. And, indeed, he was rapidly promoted, first to captain and then to major. But his burning ambition was to become a staff officer, on some senior staff to begin with, where he could show his brilliant grasp of strategy, and from which, naturally, he would be sent to the supreme headquarters.

His hopes remained unfulfilled. When he recovered from severe wounds received at the second Battle of the Somme, he was attached to the quartermaster's department, Berlin. There he had power, true enough, and it was easy for a not over-scrupulous officer to make a considerable amount of money quite quickly; still, from a military point of view it was a dead end.

All the same he had ideas, among others a theory for the mass employment of armoured fighting-vehicles, suitably armed, to break through the unbreakable barriers which the trenches had become. His theory was neither understood nor appreciated. 'That's why we lost the war,' this lieutenant-colonel, retired by the Republic, was in the habit of saying to his friends. He continued to work at his theory, making plans, preparing against the day when as he frequently told his friends, 'this damned imposed armistice that they mistakenly call peace is finally ended'.

That was why he never had any time to spare for his wife and children.

She had had a not inconsiderable fortune, but the inflation had swallowed it up, so she had had to sell her jewels. They brought in enough money to pay for the publication of her husband's book. It was entitled *War of Position or War of Movement? A Politico-Military and Technical Appreciation of Our Coming Victory*. It ran to 560 pages, was lavishly illustrated, and 3,500 copies were printed; 600 copies were given away — the postage was paid for by the colonel's family doing without their summer holiday that year — and 87 were sold. The rest of the edition cluttered up their little house so as to make it practically uninhabitable.

His wife loved this maniac, for ever immersed in his preparation for 'the coming victory'. During thirty years of marriage she had failed to notice that the terms of endearment that he occasionally used towards her were as spontaneous as the greetings on so-called romantic post-cards — the sort where a couple with glistening pomaded hair kiss pointlessly among a *décor* of doves and rambler roses.

'No,' Gerda thought, 'Denis isn't going to come in. He doesn't need me. And one day, perhaps tomorrow even, he'll go away and never come back again. He'll just say goodbye and go. No! It mustn't happen that way. I'll leave him. And I won't even say goodbye.'

She wanted to jump out of bed, but she didn't move. Her toes were freezing. It wouldn't take her a minute to collect together the few possessions she had here. Luckily she'd brought a small case with her. Her father had bought it when he'd at last agreed to accept a job as

salesman with a motor-car company. Naturally he'd soon given it up. Needless to say he had to do more important work, work that couldn't be postponed.

In her imagination everything's packed. She goes to the door without so much as a backward glance towards Denis's study. Silently? No, with a firm step. He asks her a question. Without answering she steps into the hall, but doesn't ring for the lift. Denis might speak to her while she was waiting for it to come up. She runs downstairs. He calls after her but she takes no notice. In the street she doesn't turn back, doesn't even glance up at the windows. He's standing looking down. He calls again. . . . No, he's not standing there after all.

At this hour there are only taxis about, so she walks. The first train leaves at six-fifteen. Yes, she walks to the station and decides to give up her job. She'll never come to Berlin again. She sits down in the second-class waiting-room, though, of course, she buys a third-class ticket. A handsome young man ogles her, not offensively, rather shyly really. She takes no notice of him. At last, the train. She has arrived. Now for half an hour's walk. She begins to feel tired after all. Her light bag now seems very heavy. She shifts it frequently from one arm to the other, but that doesn't really do any good. Now her hands are beginning to hurt. It's all she can do to reach the house. At last the little front garden comes in sight, and for a moment everything seems much better. But that moment is soon gone and all that's left is the intolerable heaviness of unshed tears. Apparently her father can't be bothered to answer the bell. Her brother's already gone to town. At last the door is opened, timidly; it's her mother in an old street dress. She stands in front of Gerda, who is pulled over sideways by the weight of the case she's carrying. Her mother kisses her, and Gerda is astonished that so old a woman could have so clear and light a voice. 'How lovely to see you, darling,' she says, in this remarkable voice, 'I hope you've come for a good long stay.' 'For as long as you'll have me,' Gerda replies. And now it's no good trying to hold back her tears by breathing through her mouth any longer. She can feel them pouring out of her closed eyes, running down her nose and chin and down her neck.

She was now really crying. She had reached the end of the road that led back to her mother. She was still in bed and she listened. No sound from Doino. She got up and went to the bathroom. She looked at her reflection in the little mirror on the wall. She poked her chestnut hair, which she sometimes thought remarkably beautiful, sometimes dull-looking and sometimes downright ugly, back from her face. She admitted that there were women more beautiful than she, but not

much more beautiful. As she ran her hands over her hips she really felt as though she had been carrying a suitcase for miles, her hands seemed actually stiff and cramped from the effort. And she was hungry, too. She went to the kitchen and ate the sandwiches she'd prepared for Denis. She'd take him the last one, but she'd hardly say a word to him.

When she entered his study she found Doino lying on the divan. He must have fallen asleep while playing something back to himself on the dictaphone, for he was wearing the earphones; they somehow made him look even younger than he normally did when he was peacefully, childishly asleep.

What could he have been dictating? Gently she took the earphones off his head and put them on her own. His voice came to her softly. Ah, a letter to his old professor in Vienna. Not likely to be anything interesting in that. Still she wanted to listen to his voice. Sometimes he talked to her in the way he was now speaking to the old man. His words came to her, too closely packed, and she thought:

'What's he got, that stranger, that his words should mean more to Denis than a woman's love?'

She heard:

'All perfection unachieved has to it a measure of grandeur. This is the only grandeur available to happiness as an end. As for happiness as a means, failure is certain. Lethe water deprived of almost all its power. One remembers too clearly what one should forget. We build for eternity, and in a breath our life is over: we build for infinity, yet the almost invisibly small span of our existence is all that is allotted us. If we accept the tragedy of our impermanence and of our inability to achieve the grandeur we desire, what interest can we have in being happy?

'Of all those who have renounced the search for grandeur and permanence as expressed in terms of God, we alone have attempted to transform the conditions of humanity so drastically that grandeur and permanence can be realised among men and thus human dignity can become every man's right. Only in this way will it be possible to give existence a meaning that is not a negative one.'

'What's the point of all these words?' Gerda thought. Denis should realise that. After all, he had no actual objection to happiness. Besides, even in his classless society people won't live for ever. All that stuff about permanence - hot air! All the same he was right in a way, not because of what he said but because of the way he said it, his tone of voice. The clever ones wouldn't understand that, of course. Most men

are only loved because they love Heaven knows what they imagine, though.

The stream of his words, warm and rippling, went on flowing past her. She didn't try to follow the sense. She looked at Doino; he lay with his cheek half in the soft light and half in shadow, unworried by permanence or grandeur, breathing lightly as he slept. She had already half forgiven him.

What a long letter; she began to listen again.

'All the same, even if it's true that man, that anguished and yet magical animal, cannot be transformed or that only slightly; even if it's true that all those who, in the past, have attempted such a transformation had as good reason to believe in their ultimate success as we have to believe in ours; even if it's true that from time immemorial succeeding generations have made the same mistakes over and over and over again, each generation believing that it must risk its life for an imminent and entirely new world, and believing, too, that it has opportunities denied to its predecessors. *Eh bien*, even if all that's all true, still everything good that has been done in this world has been done in this attempt to achieve the unachievable. It follows that the finest use which a man can make of his life is to live as though preparing himself for an unrealisable state in which what is of dignity in him will find permanence and - who knows? - grandeur.'

She didn't want to hear any more. Those people talk all the time about preparation. Meanwhile life slips by without their noticing. The Lord had sent His mother away, with unbelievable rudeness because he was busy with 'preparations'. Afterwards, of course, she was at liberty to cry over his corpse all she wanted, as though tears did any good.

She felt very sad again. It was all so senseless. She wanted to have children, and a man who thought only about his wife and his children. She began to nibble slowly at the last sandwich, tears forming on her eyelashes. She wasn't crying from self-pity this time. She was crying for a man whom she loved. Thus have many women cried, loving their men more than when they lay in their arms, loving them like sons they have lost.

PART THREE

‘The dead shall not praise the Lord . . .’

CHAPTER I

I

ONE might feel that nothing had been changed. The greenish-blue sky of an early spring stretched wide over their heads and the ground could not have been harder beneath their feet. Sometimes they even believed that the streets of their cities were still the same.

Yet with the passing of each day that brought the summer closer, more of them became homeless. And in the nights, which they now could no longer spend in their own beds, they began to believe that they had never owned a home, a bed, to doubt that they had ever been like other men with a life and a name of their own.

Those who compared them to sewer rats, and announced that such vermin would quickly be stamped out, soon realised that the hunt would be a long one. And at times it was hard to tell who the hunter was and who the hunted.

They came from the teeming tenements of the unemployed, from the factories, from the Party offices; for the most part they were those 'subordinate leaders who had always failed to understand'. They formed the illegal Party. The enemy knew that. He saw their writings on the walls, announcing that the stricken Party lived on; he saw it, in the early morning mist, when a red flag fluttered from the top of a factory chimney. He saw it in leaflets, in drawings and even on the main roads themselves; specially prepared tyres left behind them, where the speeding car had passed, mile after mile, the slogans: *CP lives; RFB * will be back.*

Names and places that had once had no special meaning were now only mentioned by the people in low and warning tones: Papestrasse, Columbiahaus, Oranienburg, Dachau. These names became more and more numerous, names that signified places of nameless suffering.

It was known that the prisoners had only to speak in order to end their ordeal. And it was known they didn't speak.

They became, for the people, a subject of fright, for they were afraid lest they should have to share in the horrors which were their lot.

* Roter Frontkaempfverbund : The German para-military communist organisation.

They grew tired of sacrifice and tried to forget, as quickly as they could, for whose sake the sacrifices were being made.

The Party lived, but it lived isolated from the masses to whom, like a saviour that is drowning, it appealed for help. The Party lived through its 'outlaws'. Their hopes lay in the coming autumn. When the rain came, though, it washed away their inscriptions on the walls so that they looked like runic letters, surviving as incomprehensible memorials of a forgotten past. Yet their hope was so great that for them it replaced everything else, a limitless hope for which they suffered worse than death.

And it became more general, and like a sure promise, when – after winter had come and the people still hadn't revolted – a voice was heard. It spoke in a broken German, with a foreign accent, yet it was the first call which everyone could hear. And everyone could understand its meaning. So it was easier to endure the hard winter. Spring came and still the Party lived. The outlaws of the year before were mostly gone: shot 'while attempting to escape', immured in prisons, subjected to daily torture in the concentration camps.

It was a new Party that lived in the new outlaws. Contacts were snapped, whole district organisations were at times cut off. Yet new contacts were always formed, new men filled the positions from which the old had been taken away to their destruction.

Was it the same sky that stretched above their heads? Had the ground not grown harder beneath their feet? Had the streets not changed? Had their country not become a strange land, enemy territory?

It could happen that you'd be standing and looking into a shop window, to make sure that you weren't being followed, and suddenly you'd notice your reflection and realise with a shock that you'd become somebody else. It's hard, then, not to speak aloud the nicknames that you had as a child, and so, perhaps, to rediscover yourself in this stranger.

It could happen that you'd awake with a start and only slowly regain control over your nerves. No, you didn't sleep through that hour just before dawn, the time when they usually came to get people. Yet you couldn't go back to sleep, for now all the objects around you seemed as hatefully hostile as treachery: the strange bed, the street-lamp shining into the room, the wardrobe full of clothes, the loud and hasty breathing of the sleeper in the other room. Everything became uncertain. You got dressed hurriedly and waited, waiting for the dawn, waiting for it to be time to keep your appointment. If the other man were picked up before you met, then you'd find yourself cut off

from all contacts; they might well not be renewed for weeks or even months.

It could happen that you'd arrived for the appointment exactly on time. Waiting wasn't allowed. The man didn't come. You'd walk on, knowing you'd never see him again. And you'd be sorry that you hadn't been able to stand the way he cracked his finger joints and that once, impatiently, you'd told him so.

It could happen that you'd be sleeping with a woman. They'd dragged her husband from her bed. A little later she'd received the usual cardboard box. In it were his ashes. And now you shared a room with this woman. She had no tears, no age. And in the night you were a man and a woman together. And you couldn't be sure whether you'd done it out of pity for her or in mourning for yourself.

Yet you lived, and the Party lived too. It didn't die with the death of those men in whom it lived. For there were always fresh ones. It was Herbert Soennecke's job to see to it that there were always replacements ready.

2

Soennecke hadn't emigrated. On Party orders he'd gone abroad twice, for short visits, and then returned.

No one, without exception, knew where he lived nor what his alias was. This was a condition he had insisted on to the Party leadership abroad and to the G.P.U.

In foreign newspapers there were frequent reports of his attending meetings, and his picture was often printed in the illustrated weeklies: 'Herbert Soennecke with a worker's delegation at Magnitogorsk', and so on. For a long time the Gestapo was taken in by this ruse, but eventually they saw through it and put their agents on to tracking him down. They did, indeed, find traces of him, now in Berlin, now in Stuttgart, or in Breslau, or Gelsenkirchen, but him they never found.

When Hertha Soennecke asked for passports for their two children, they gave them to her solely because they hoped that Soennecke wouldn't let his children leave the country without seeing them once more. Constant observation of them, however, drew a blank.

And even when it happened – and it didn't happen often – that they forced a prisoner to speak, he could say nothing about Soennecke. The authorities decided that in this case they'd have to use new methods. This game needed special hunters.

Sometimes it seemed to him that the previous ten years had been a

futile and sad waste of time. The life he now led might be hard, but there was at least a purpose to it that made it worth while, and, therefore, easy. It would become truly hard and full of backbreaking anxiety only if he read what they were printing abroad or if a part of his difficultly maintained organisation were to collapse. Yet all that was easier to bear than one day spent as a refugee or than having to meet the Party leadership outside the country.

None of those who lived abroad realised what was going on at home, possibly because it was unimaginable or possibly because they couldn't have lived the way they did had they known.

'When you're writing stuff for distribution inside Germany you must be consciously aware the whole time that the man who reads it will be taking his life in his hands to do so.'

'Yes, we know that . . .' they'd answered.

'Really? I'm glad. I wouldn't have thought so.'

'What do you mean by that?'

'Nothing, except that it's not worth risking one comrade's little toe-nail in order to tell the working class that its chief enemy is still, as it has always been, social democracy.'

'Aha! So you're against the Party line?'

'No, I'm in favour of its being intelligently applied; that's all. And I'm in favour of your young scribblers being reminded from time to time that what they're writing with is the finest blood of the working class.'

No, the atmosphere among the *émigrés* was stifling. After a few hours of it one longed to be back at the front.

Soennecke had himself picked his closest co-workers and the Party had finally approved this procedure. Each of these six men was entirely unknown to the other five, yet through them Soennecke was in touch with what was being done throughout the country. Only two of them even knew his real name. Josmar was one of those two.'

The contacts had broken down. The first notice of it came from the frontier-post abroad. For seven months everything connected with this frontier-post had been working remarkably smoothly. However, for the past two months, none of the comrades from inside the country had appeared for previously arranged meetings. So it looked as though the responsible comrades had been caught. Now all the communication

systems were left dangling and the important frontier zone was cut off. Soennecke gave Josmar the job of finding out, on the spot, what had happened. After they'd finished talking he dismissed him without a word. This had lately become a habit of Soennecke's: he wouldn't look at a man when he was shaking hands to say goodbye. It was as though the man had ceased to exist for Soennecke the moment that he had decided to leave his presence.

The tram was reaching the end of the line. Apart from Josmar the only passenger left was one small boy who had a runny nose and, apparently, no handkerchief. Josmar wondered whether, in different circumstances, the child's sniffing would have irritated him so. At the terminus the boy got out before Josmar. He had one leg shorter than the other, and he ran clumsily ahead of Josmar. The latter felt as though he had done this little boy an injury.

He still had a twenty-minutes' walk. The street was unpaved. It must have snowed in the night and now there was slush. Josmar couldn't walk fast enough.

It was a tiny little house. The minute garden in front, with its sickly shrubs, made it seem more wretched than ever. Josmar had to ring twice. A great haggard woman, with greying blonde hair falling over her forehead, half opened the door and asked, harshly:

'What do you want? We're not buying anything.'

Josmar, coming closer and putting his foot on the lowest of the four outside steps, said:

'I'm not a salesman. I've come about the second-hand bicycle you advertised a little while back.'

The woman looked at him distrustfully and said:

'The bicycle's been gone a long time.'

Slowly she began to withdraw into the hall, then she came forward again and said:

'Come in. You've had a long walk, I expect, and it's cold.'

'Yes,' said Josmar. 'Thank you.'

He jumped quickly up the steps.

She led him through the kitchen into the parlour. Its window opened on to a wide field ending in a railway embankment on which a goods train was being assembled. She asked him to sit down, though she herself remained standing. She didn't take her eyes off him.

'The bicycle's gone,' she repeated with emphasis. 'If that's what you've come for you're too late. They came and took him, Albert. Two months ago. He wrote once. Since then, nothing. He's not alive,

otherwise he'd have written, he was always a good son. But if he's dead they'd have told me.'

She was still standing, so he thought he should stand up too, but with a surprisingly energetic gesture the old woman signalled him to sit down again.

'Can you remember the exact day it happened?' he asked, hesitantly.

She pointed at the calendar hanging on the wall. It was the sort where you tear off the days. It showed November 6. She said pensively: 'Albert always tore off the old date.'

'And now it is January 3,' Josmar said, and realised at once that he was speaking stupidly. He added quickly:

'Did they search the house?'

'Yes,' the woman said at last, pushing the hair back off her forehead.

'What did they find?'

'Nothing. Nothing at all,' she repeated, finally taking her intense gaze from his face.

'Have you any idea how it happened? Have you any suspicions?' She didn't reply. 'It's for your son's sake. You must tell me everything you know.'

'I must go to the kitchen. If you haven't eaten you can stay. There's some red cabbage and potatoes and a bit of sausage. It's not much, but now Albert's not here to help with the bills it's still more than we can afford.'

The woman urged him to help himself freely; she herself scarcely ate anything. She broke her bread into very small pieces which she absentmindedly popped, one by one, into her mouth. She kept staring at him all the time. Sometimes it seemed to him that she hated him, and at others that she was looking for something in his face, something that she couldn't find there. He made an effort to be talkative, but soon gave up, for the woman didn't seem to be listening. He said:

'Yes, the example Dimitrov's given us. . . .'

She interrupted him:

'Yes, his mother and sister were there. I've seen a picture of them all. It's fine when there's peace in the home.'

'Yes,' Josmar answered, somewhat confused. 'Yes, indeed.'

The woman said nothing more. She hastily shoved one little piece of bread after another into her mouth. It was as though she chewed them out of hatred. She had beautiful white teeth.

When at last he stood up she drew him to the window.

'You see the allotments over there? You see that little house with the blue shutters? The man in there might be able to tell you something.'

He's called August Schulze. He works on the railroad in the repair shop. He might be home now.'

Schulze trusted him at once. He sent his wife out to do the shopping. The baby cried so that he took it out of its cot and held it in his arms, upright in its swaddling clothes. It soon fell asleep without Schulze noticing.

He was a small man, solidly built, everything about him was broad. His steel-rimmed spectacles kept slipping from his nose, and when this happened he made a comical grimace, screwing up his nose until he was almost unrecognisable and pushing back his glasses. Then his reddish moustache stuck straight up in the air, as though it were attached to his face at an angle.

'Yes, you see, having Albert get pinched was a bad blow for us; I was the only one who knew anything, you see, so I took his place. But they all knew me, they were after me right away, you see, I've been in it from the start, so I couldn't go on with it. You see, the comrade who took over from me, they pinched him right away. That's happened five times already in two months. It can't go on, you see, not this way it can't.'

The man spoke in an even tone, as though describing some unimportant incident connected with his job. Also his continual repetition of 'you see' got on Josmar's nerves.

'When that happened to Albert, and he was always caution itself,' Schulze went on, in the same tone of voice, 'I thought at first it must be his sister and her husband. On account of the old woman's house, you see. They'd have liked to live there and Albert was naturally against it, you see. And her husband's that sort of fellow. But then, after a while, you see, we began to think. About his girl, you see. His sister, after all, she couldn't know anything much about the other chaps, but his girl, well, Albert's a man, you see, and it's possible . . . I don't know anything definite, you understand . . . You see . . . It shouldn't happen but it could happen . . . '

Josmar arranged that Schulze should fix a meeting for him with Albert's last successor. He didn't know the name of Albert's girl. And no one knew where Albert had hidden his papers with names, addresses, and so on. And without them the work could hardly be carried on.

This time, Albert's mother let him in at once. It seemed to Josmar almost as though she'd been waiting for him.

'Now,' she began, almost before he had sat down. 'I should know best about my own daughter. It wasn't her. It's true she didn't care for

Albert the way a sister should. They never got on. But she didn't do that . . . not that.'

'Then why should anyone think she did?'

'She was always running complaining to the neighbours. Even when she was a child she used to think she wasn't getting her share and her brother was getting everything. And lately, since her husband's been telling her she had a right to the house because of her two kids and his being out of work, she began to make threats, that's true, but do that, no, she didn't do that, not her.'

'Who did then?' Josmar asked.

She busied herself for a moment over the fire in the stove and then turned her back to him with the poker still in her hand. Her hair had fallen over her forehead again. Jerkily, sounding almost pleased, so strong was the note of triumph in her voice, she said:

'Who? The fat girl, of course. Albert's mistress. She was his bad luck, I always told him so, but he wouldn't believe me. And she killed him, her and nobody else. She turned his head, I told him, but he wouldn't listen. He wouldn't allow me to say what I thought of her, what I'd thought of her since the first time I clapped eyes on her.'

At last he managed to interrupt her. She gave him the girl's name and address. Before she'd let him go she made him promise to come and see her again. She wanted to know whether he'd been able to 'squeeze the truth out of the fat girl'.

She lived at the other end of the town. The tram took him to the station, in the centre of the town, and there he got a local train. It was evening and there was a cold, dry wind blowing in his face as he left the station. As usual he'd memorised a map of the town, for asking the way draws attention to oneself. However, the lighting was bad, and he lost his way once or twice before he reached his destination. It was an old house, 'with a high, wide front door, through which a loaded wagon could have been driven. The sight of this door increased unpleasantly the sensation of strangeness that he had experienced since leaving the train.'

He had to wait a while before his knock was answered. He stepped quickly over the threshold and found himself in a big attic room. He noticed the bed and a pile of men's shirts, neatly stacked, and beside them a sewing-machine. Only by half turning could he see the woman who had let him in. She stood behind the door as though she wanted to hide from the man who had just come in, and her right hand still grasped the knob. Josmar looked at her with care; he wasn't sure

whether it was the gaslight that made her face seem so pale. At last she closed the door.

'What do you want?' she asked, looking past him.

He had already decided how to start the conversation. Yet looking at the little plump woman in the yellow dressing-gown with the pattern of over-large red asters, and seeing her face that was normally pretty in a dull sort of way but was now aged and marked by suffering, he realised that his plan was wrong. He said, in a harsh voice:

'I've come about Albert.'

She nodded. Moving away from the door at last she went and sat on the edge of the bed. There was only one unoccupied chair, the others being all covered with laundry, and Josmar sat on it. He tried to catch the woman's eye, but she stubbornly kept her gaze lowered. He repeated:

'I've come about your friend. You understand, Fräulein Lüttge?'

She answered without looking up:

'What more do you want from me? I know nothing. I've told you everything I know.'

It was simpler than he thought. She took him for a Gestapo agent. And there was no doubt that she was the traitor. He found her utterly unspeakable, as she sat there staring at her red hands folded in her lap. It was easy for him now to be harsh.

'No. You haven't said everything. You'd like to know how your friend's getting along, wouldn't you?'

'Yes,' she said, and she raised her head swiftly, but only for a second. Then she stiffened again. 'It doesn't make any difference any more,' she added softly.

'No difference!' He forced himself to speak in a convincing and friendly voice. 'If you behave yourself, he'll be set free and he'll have you to thank for it.'

She shook her head. It seemed to Josmar as though her lips were moving, and yet she said nothing.

'Don't you want to save Albert, then? It's up to you now if you want us to pardon him.'

She said:

'I know nothing, absolutely nothing. You can kill me if you like, and that might be best. I know nothing.'

She began to get up slowly, but it was as though she hadn't the strength for when she'd half risen she sank back again on to the bed.

Josmar decided to change his approach; his original plan had been the right one after all. He opened his suitcase and began to take out the

merchandise it contained – notepaper in gift wrappings, coloured pencils, fountain pens, eau de cologne – and laid them out on the table.

'If anyone should come in, we're talking about my stuff here. My prices are on the average twenty-five per cent below those in the shops. For a purchase of over three marks you get a ten per cent reduction on writing-paper and a fifteen per cent reduction on eau de cologne. Remember that, just in case . . . Do you follow me?'

She glanced at him in amazement and then gazed at the blue writing-paper.

'I'm no Gestapo agent, I'm a friend of Albert's. I've come because of the advertisement in the second-hand-for-sale column, do you understand? The bicycle, do you hear me?'

She was looking at him attentively now and he took off the pair of spectacles he had put on coming up the stairs. If he hadn't grown this dreadful moustache, and if the sides and back of his head weren't shaved, in fact, if he looked more like himself, he was sure she'd trust him.

He looked her straight in the eyes and said:

'I'm from the Party. We must know exactly what happened to help Albert. To be able to help you as well.'

She shrugged her shoulders and stared at her hands again.

'Do you believe me? Do you understand what I'm saying? I'm trying to help.'

She moved her lips, and at last he understood.

'There's no help possible.'

He waited, but she said no more.

'You must tell me everything that happened, down to the most minute details. They say you betrayed him and . . .'

'I did betray him,' she said. 'It's all my fault. I don't know why I'm still alive. This is Albert's child. He's breathing already.'

She laid her hands on her stomach. He realised he should have recognised her condition at once, if only by her walk and her bloodless lips.

'The Party will look after Albert's child,' he said.

'The Party,' she repeated, 'the Party! No one looks after anyone. I should know. I was an orphan, brought up by strangers. And my child, too, will . . .' she couldn't go on, shaken by a paroxysm of sobs. Suddenly she put her hand to her mouth. She stood up and ran clumsily to the basin. She vomited. A sickly sour smell spread through the room.

'I'm sorry,' she said, when it was all over and she was once again

seated on the edge of the bed. 'It shouldn't happen after the second or third month. I'd got past it, too. Then, when they came and fetched me, six weeks ago, telling me I'd see Albert, it started again. I wonder, is it bad for baby?'

As before, he felt that she wasn't talking to him. Perhaps she'd grown so used to talking to herself that it didn't matter if a stranger was listening. As when her words were lost among the humming of the sewing-machine.

In this way she now began to tell the story in great detail. She forgot herself, going on and on about quite irrelevant trivialities, while other important incidents he only got out of her through the questions with which from time to time he interrupted her narrative.

She had known Albert for two years. She wanted to marry him, but they'd had to wait because Albert was always out of work and his mother had disliked her from the first meeting, so that they couldn't have gone to live in her house. In the summer she'd moved here, at Albert's request. In her old house too many people had known him, and he'd had to be careful. So she'd come here, where she'd known no one. And she'd simply forgotten her old friends; it was more sensible that way. Almost as soon as she'd moved into her new place she'd found that she was pregnant. Then she'd insisted on getting married; he could live with her until he'd found work and she could support them both with what she earned. He agreed to this but kept postponing it. Then he started not coming to see her for four or five days at a time; she was so frightened on his account, and on account of the child which would be illegitimate if anything should happen to him. He wasn't unkind to her, but his thoughts were elsewhere; though he always said he loved her, there were more important things than love. And one day when he'd disappeared again and she was very unhappy and entirely alone, she happened to be in the town delivering her work; suddenly she couldn't bear it any longer, having nobody at all to talk to, and so she'd looked up her girl friend who worked behind the food counter in Woolworth's. Else was very sweet to her and it made her feel better to have someone she could talk to about it all.

Then Else began to make her suspicious of Albert. She said it was typical of a man to seduce a poor orphan, get her in the family way, and then gradually disappear. She told Else right away that Albert wasn't that sort of man; if sometimes he was gone for days on end it wasn't because he was with other women, it was because he had things to do. But Else knew Albert had no job. .

And Else came frequently to see her, always bringing a little present

and always getting back to the subject of Albert, saying that there was something wrong there, that one day he'd walk out on her. Bit by bit Erna became confused by all this talk. One day when Else had started again about Albert, Erna simply told her everything. And Else said it was probably all made up, that Albert had spun her that yarn so as to keep her quiet, so that he could go off whenever it suited him, because once a woman's pregnant she doesn't attract a man any more.

She couldn't tell Albert about all this, because he wasn't supposed to know that Else came to see her and that they were such close friends. And so bit by bit she told Else everything, about how Albert had gone abroad for a conference, about how sometimes he'd sit up all night writing; in fact, she told her everything she knew.

And since they'd taken Albert away, Else hadn't come to see her once. She wasn't married at all, in spite of what she'd said, but she had a boy friend who was in the Gestapo. He was the man who'd taken her, later on, to the place where they'd put Albert.

She began to retch again. The atmosphere in the room was unbearable. There was no window, so Josmar opened the skylight. Outside it had begun to snow and the snow fell into the room. When the woman had at last returned to the edge of the bed she seemed to be freezing with cold. Josmar closed the skylight and sat down again. The woman was breathing with her mouth open; she only recovered slowly.

The tone of her recital changed now. Many parts were smothered in sobs and she couldn't stop herself from crying.

Else's man had taken her into a room and told her to stand behind a half-open door. Through the crack she could see into a room where Albert was. He looked so badly, so ill, that she hardly recognised him. There were several men in there. They wanted Albert to admit something, and he kept answering:

'No!'

Then they started to beat him up, with their fists, with a revolver butt, and, when he fell down, they struck him in the face so that he was soon covered in blood. And then he didn't move any more, but they went on kicking him in the stomach and everywhere. And then they dragged her into the room and told her that she must tell them everything she knew then and there, otherwise they were going to finish Albert off before her eyes and in that case she could take the corpse of her brat's father away with her and bury it. And she didn't want them to do anything more to Albert, and he lay there not moving but groaning so horribly and then she remembered a trip she'd made

with him in the spring to Saxon Switzerland and how she'd met pals of Albert's. She still knew a lot of their names and she'd already told the men some of them when one of them threw a jug of water over Albert, so that he came to, and suddenly cried out:

'Erna! Judas!'

And then, looking at him, she'd realised that it could never be the same between her and Albert again. He'd never forgive her. She hadn't said anything more.

Josmar began to replace the stock of merchandise in his case. He didn't look at her. He had nothing more to say, no more questions to ask. He couldn't stand any more of this woman or of this room with the foul smell that wouldn't go.

'Perhaps if Albert was told everything so that he knew....'

She stopped.

'What?' he asked, and looked at her attentively. 'Listen carefully, Fräulein Lüttge. The Party has a thousand ears and a thousand eyes, and can find a way even where there is no way. I know you didn't mean to do any harm. If you'll help the Party, the Party'll help you. Albert had papers that we need urgently. Do you know where they are?'

For the first time she looked him straight in the eyes.

'How can I tell you're not a Gestapo man? I don't know you.'

'Do you know about the bicycle, the second-hand bicycle?'

She shook her head. But she got up heavily, leaned down with difficulty, and pulled a wicker case out from under the bed. She opened it, fumbled in it for some time, and at last straightened up and placed a small wooden crucifix on the table. The ivory figure of Christ had become partially detached; the nails through the breast and hands had fallen out and the figure was entirely askew.

'Place your right hand on the cross and swear to me that you're a communist.'

He wanted to tell her that he was an unbeliever, but he decided not to and did as she said. She took the chair he'd been sitting on and dragged it over to the corner by the gas stove. He looked at the cross with its crooked figure. He felt pity for the woman; she was poorer than he'd imagined. He began carefully to replace the figure of Christ in its proper position.

Josmar immediately opened the package she gave him. He found in it accounts, 240 marks in notes and a list of names. He settled down to transcribe the names, which involved in part a tedious mathematical operation. It wouldn't have been hard to persuade someone that the

list of numbers was part of a calculation in thermo-dynamics which he, an unemployed engineer, had been engaged on for a long time. He went over to the stove and burned all Albert's papers.

The woman placed three marks and sixty-five pfennigs worth of small change on the table.

'That belongs with the other money. Albert didn't want to make the package any bulkier, which is why he left it out,' she said. 'And, please, what does the blue notepaper with the gift wrapping cost?'

He made her a present of the paper, quickly closed his case and got ready to go. She stood at the door. He said, without looking at her:

'Albert will know,' and went rapidly out.

He forgot to shake hands with her.

4

Josmar awoke with a start, as though dragged out of sleep by a threat. He needed a little time, a time filled with childish terror, before he remembered that he was in a strange town, in bed in a hotel bedroom, and that his name here was Albert Frank. He had shooting pains in his throat and his pyjama jacket stuck to his body: the medicine had worked and he'd sweated profusely.

However, the woman's voice in the next room, growing all the time louder and more penetrating, reminded him that it wasn't the pain that had awakened him; he recalled that in his dream somebody had been talking to him with exactly that tone and voice, far away and yet nearby, and that it had been agony to him.

The woman didn't care whether the people in the adjoining room could hear her or not; she found more and more bitter complaints to hurl at her husband; she accused him of cheating, lying, unnatural vice, thoughtless selfishness, and finally of planning to bring his wife to an early grave so that he might enjoy a fresh life of dishonour and debauchery with a drunken slut by the name of Berta. The woman seemed to be particularly offended by the man's pretence of being asleep and by his refusal to answer her:

'I won't let you sleep, Emil, I promise you that. I've got to get it out of my system, otherwise I'll suffocate.'

Since the woman's voice made sleep out of the question, Josmar would have liked to use this time to think certain things over in his mind, but each time she began again pouring forth her poisonous flood of words he found himself listening. It seemed to remind him of some-

thing that he had often and in vain attempted to remember. Yet nothing like that had ever happened to him.

At last the husband, Emil, seemed to react, the monologue became a dialogue, the woman became audibly calmer, the conversation petered out, the creaking of the bedsprings was painfully plain, there was the padding of bare feet on the floor, a tap was turned on, there were footsteps again, followed immediately by loud, high pitched snores accompanied, as it were, by soft and yet remarkably shrill sobs.

'The hell with her, she's still not asleep! What's more, I should have shaken hands with Albert's girl and said something nice to her before leaving,' Josmar suddenly thought. However, there was nothing to be done about it now; besides it was quite unimportant and he wanted to sleep, to sweat out the fever, so that he'd be able to cope with the coming day.

Yet he couldn't go to sleep again. Thoughts and premonitions gripped him and forced him into a state of wakefulness that differed from daylight wakefulness, that was like a fear that had him at its mercy because he felt it without understanding it: a fear that was not of his creation, but that seemed to have been following him for a long time and had caught up with him at last and now fastened on to him in the ambush of the night.

Josmar, since this had happened to him before though not frequently, knew the usual causes. A man doesn't sleep if he's suffering from a wound to his self-esteem from which he is trying vainly to protect himself. A man doesn't sleep if he isn't at peace with himself. A man doesn't sleep if the actions of the previous day or the promises or threats of the one to come are too great. This was the first time that Josmar had been kept awake by someone else's fears, by the burdens of someone else's life. And since this was the first time and the first steps down a path which, by daylight, would seem to be merely a small détour, Josmar couldn't realise that this 'someone else', whom he thought at this moment to recognise and to dismiss as a stranger, was, in fact, himself. 'And yet it's all so simple withal'; those were the words with which Edi used to start to speak in the debates at Lenzdorf, when he was settling down to elucidate, in his usual clear fashion, some confused problems against which they'd all been bashing their brains. Josmar avoided using the phrase in conversation, but it was his invariable opening when thinking out something by himself. And so he began this time, almost shouting it aloud in the badly-heated hotel room: 'And yet it's all so simple withal.' That Erna Lüttge was a pathetic creature, all right, but all that mattered was that she was

a traitress. From stupidity, from ignorance – imagine getting someone to swear on the cross that he's a communist – from poverty and humility? So be it. It's not the reasons but the effects that count. She's guilty.

So Josmar started off well, and hurried towards his conclusions. Erna Lüttge, the traitress, was condemned in the name of the movement, which was all that mattered, condemned by the uncompromising logic of the struggle.

Yet there was the stench of vomit. Josmar saw himself sitting under the skylight with the snow falling into the room. And the woman next door was still sobbing.

That's all beside the point, Josmar said, determined to dismiss the haunting picture. It's all quite simple: guilt is guilt.

Josmar was a gifted technician and a man of initiative in that field, but he was no thinker. At Lenzdorf they'd taught him to love Plato and honour Kant. Later he'd found in Marxism the complete answer to all his philosophic requirements. He was no theoriser on the subject of the class struggle, no Marxist philosopher: he was a soldier. He thought he knew exactly what he was fighting for. There was such a thing as evil, and it was against that that he was fighting when he condemned the wretched Erna Lüttge out of hand.

That Erna Lüttge's guilt was incompatible with the determinism which explained all phenomena so satisfactorily for Josmar, that where there is no free will there can be no responsibility – all that was tripe. There were answers, satisfactory if perhaps a little tortuous, but entirely convincing for those who were already convinced. Josmar was back on the right track again, yet he left it, and in such a way that it seemed rather as if the track had left him. For there was his childhood again. He had feared and hated sin. Frightened and easily discouraged, he had asked himself why God led men into temptation, *He who knew everything in advance and who alone decided everything.*

He was bitterly cold and would have liked to change his pyjamas, but he'd only brought one pair with him. The woman in the next room had stopped sobbing. At last the persistent memory of that smell was gone. Naturally at first glance there seems to be a strong resemblance between the solution offered by the church and the one offered by Marxism. But naturally it wasn't so. And Josmar made an effort to 'put all that out of his mind' as quickly as possible. Yet to put something out of one's mind, as he had long been aware, one had to think of something else, something that one could hang on to.

Take Soennecke. He, too, had a private life, of course. Although it

was hard to imagine what it was like. There was his girl. She came from a rich family in Berlin-Dahlem. She talked to Soennecke as though he were a fine but far too inexperienced boy. And she was over twenty years younger than he. She treated the men she met with Soennecke as though they were her inferiors because they took their orders from Soennecke. Josmar didn't care for her. Now she'd emigrated. In spite of everything, Erna Lüttge was more sympathetic than she, and truer, despite her treachery. But she's poor. 'It's the poor that get the blame.' Not with us, that's the way of the social system. We, we ...

The Goebens considered themselves an old family. Josmar's father's grandfather had already been well off. And they didn't conceal the fact that as far back as the Goeben family went, a Goeben would always be found occupying a worthy position. Therefore they held aloof from 'new families', recently enriched and upstarts. Among his friends Goeben's father spoke of such people as 'proletarians'. The workers, the real proletariat, were considered to be human in so far as they proved, by the practice of religion and by their membership of the Christian guilds, that they were respectable people.

Josmar had soon recognised the narrowness of such an attitude. Yet tonight was the first occasion that he realised, with sorrow, that the life of an Erna Lüttge remained exactly as strange to him as to his father, that despite everything he neither knew nor understood poverty. And an unspeakable suspicion soon became for him a certainty; the reason for his condemning that poor woman so firmly and with such aversion was that her bottomless poverty made her a stranger to him.

Vasso was right. No pity! But Erna Lüttge was bound to go under if she were denied pity. She wouldn't have become a traitress if Albert had had pity for her. True enough, in battle one can't bother about the weak; but if even among the fighters themselves there were to be weaklings, if ...

Josmar thought it was his fever that stopped him from sleeping and pestered him with all these superfluous ideas. And in order to free himself once and for all from this foreign power, and as a sort of peace-offering to it, he made up his mind that as soon as he had rapidly and thoroughly transacted his business in this town, and before leaving, he would try to persuade Albert's mother that she ought to take her grandchild's mother into her house.

But immediately he accused himself of petit-bourgeois sentimentality. In the movement and particularly among the intellectuals that was a grave insult. Yet on this occasion it didn't worry Josmar. For the first

time in his life it seemed to him stupid. Yes, he'd do his best to win her over for the unhappy girl.

Soennecke would understand what he was doing. He'd have taken charge of Erna Lüttge right away. He knew – and certainly hadn't forgotten – what poverty was. On the other hand, if one started to balance the rights of the individual against those of the cause, against those of the Party, in any way whatever . . . where would one end up? No, the individuals could have no rights that conflicted with those of the Party. Erna Lüttge had been condemned. In such a life-and-death struggle no one could be granted the plea of extenuating circumstances.

Only a few days before some of the best comrades had been shot 'while attempting to escape' – irreplaceable fighters. And he lay there, worrying about justice for the traitress Erna Lüttge. That was the fever. It was really too stupid.

Josmar wasn't the only man who remembered every day and every night that every day and every night his comrades in arms were being murdered. He wasn't the only one whom this continual memory made harder, harder than the love for his own life could bear. Yet in this night a thought of this sort came to him for the first time: 'Perhaps so many of our people have to die because we've never paid enough attention to the too many Ernas, the too many weak people in the world.' For the first time it occurred to him that though humanitarianism might be 'petit-bourgeois sentimentality', it might also conceal something more important, a political problem.

When Doino had once spoken of the servitude of existence he hadn't listened. Now he tried to recall the memory of that night. He didn't succeed. He couldn't even recollect where they had been talking about it. He only heard the tone of Doino's voice, the words were lost, the circumstances wiped away – had it been by the sea or up in the mountains? – and he couldn't remember Doino's face.

The servitude of existence? What did that idea lead to? It was absolutely full of obscurity, a really bourgeois expression, Josmar thought. He was dead tired. Delving like he was doing was fruitless.

He awoke with a terrified start – so he must finally have got to sleep – yet the noise came from the street below; the whole front of the house opposite glittered blue, and its windows stood out like blank mirrors. They were working on, the tramlines down there. 'A wonderful business, autogenous welding,' thought Josmar, half aloud. He heard himself say it and he had to laugh: He was in a good temper now. He knew he'd soon fall asleep again. Erna Lüttge meant nothing to him.

He had a job to do. There was no such thing as the servitude of existence. And he'd reorganise everything in this district. Here the Party would speak loud and clear, he thought happily.

He wanted to sleep; he was tired. Yet he'd have liked to sing. He hummed a tune softly. Only gradually did the words come to him. It was an old, old soldiers' song: *Pity us, oh Lord, pity us. . . .*

He had a high temperature. It was only an hour after midnight. Josmar didn't go to sleep again.

5

It wasn't worth lighting the gas. She felt her way past the chair covered in laundry and the table that always seemed so huge in the dark until she got to the sink where she drank a glass of water. Every other part of the town had electric light. Only here it hadn't been laid on. When she'd rented this place the landlord had said that gaslight was friendlier and easier on the eyes. Albert said that this was true, but all the same it wasn't convenient.

She felt well now. She'd been so sick all evening that she hadn't touched her supper. It was still on the gas-ring where she'd prepared it at noon. She wasn't afraid of vomiting now and she could risk it. She found the matches easily enough and lit the flame under the pot of split peas. She pulled up the stool and sat down gingerly — Albert had intended to mend it, but he'd never got round to it — and gazed at the blue flame. Blue's pretty, she thought. She had no idea what the time was. She felt so rested she might have slept all of five hours. Albert loved split peas and bacon. He always said that the way she made it it tasted twice as good to him. If it was a boy, she'd call him Albert too. If it was a girl, she certainly wouldn't call her Erna. Too common. Renate she'd be called, or Marlene, something that'd give her a different start in life. A girl called Erna couldn't ever hope to get anywhere. It was a servant-girl's name.

If she liked them she'd eat up all the peas. Now that she wasn't afraid of vomiting she could eat her fill without worrying. And tomorrow, when she'd delivered the laundry and been paid, she'd go straight to the automat and eat as many sandwiches as she wanted and drink a glass of malt beer, too — it was supposed to be good for her in her condition — and then she'd have a coffee and a honey-cake. You must have something you fancy from time to time, and in her condition it was good for her to change the sort of food she ate.

She ate straight out of the pot — just as good that way — and she left

the flame burning so that she had light too. She crumbled a piece of bread into the peas; it tasted so very good that way, it really filled you up. Only you mustn't think about vomiting; like that you can eat as much as you want.

Then she filled the pan right up to the top with water; otherwise the stuff stuck to the sides and made it hard to wash up. She was sorry to turn off the flame – it gave such a pretty light-blue in the darkness – but the gas bill was already high enough without that.

It was lovely and warm under the blanket. The half hour was just striking. When it wasn't actually striking the hour it was funny; you knew when it was quarter-past or half-past or quarter-to, but you didn't know what the time was. The idea amused her. She tried to imagine what it would be like if there were no whole hours. Or even no clocks at all and no calendars. You'd say it was today, but it might be yesterday or tomorrow. 'Yes, I'm not so stupid,' she thought, 'I've got my own thoughts too.'

That was something that was pretty at night, a skylight like that. A square of brightness lay on the table, that's the light, the light of heaven in the room. When you looked at that you didn't feel quite so lonely.

Just don't think about vomiting and then you won't. It must end sooner or later. This evening, when the man was here, perhaps that was the last time. And now it's all finished with. He hadn't really looked at all like one of Albert's friends. But he certainly was one. And he'd sworn it seriously. And no one swears a lie on the cross. Now perhaps she hadn't been careful enough, perhaps she shouldn't have eaten the whole pot full. In her condition you have to be careful. But just because the taste is coming up, that doesn't mean it's starting again. You mustn't think about it. All the same he hadn't looked like a communist. He'd certainly never earned his living with his hands. You can tell that right away. The way he looked at her as though he was a proper toff. They always want to let you see that they despise you. Oh God! perhaps he was a Gestapo agent and that was just another of their tricks!

She sat up. Nausea gripped her again. She put her hands to her mouth, but it was no good, it came up. She couldn't find the sink. It had gone all over the floor, provided it hadn't splashed on to the laundry. She stood, helplessly. She was freezing cold. 'Oh God, if he was an agent, and me giving him those papers. And now they'll kill Albert. With the axe. I couldn't go on living!'

She felt her way towards the gas-stove and found the matches. She

wanted to light the lamp. She turned the gas-tap, but her hand trembled so that she couldn't reach up to the mantle of the lamp. So she felt for a chair to stand on. It was covered in laundry and fell over. If the laundry had fallen into the vomit she'd have to boil it all; there was no other way of getting rid of the smell.

The gas hissed out of the lamp with a soft, whistling noise. She'd dropped the matches now. She began to cry. She was freezing cold. She'd had enough. She felt her way again over to the stove. No, there were no more matches. And she'd had enough. She turned on both rings. The pot still stood on one of them. She sat down. To die was after all the easiest thing she'd ever done in her life, she thought. She'd have liked to have held the cross in her hand, now that she was dying. But it was a sin to die this way. She said: 'Our Father which art in heaven.' But she couldn't go on. She kept repeating: 'Our Father which art in heaven.' The clock in the church tower struck. She didn't know whether it was the hour or just the quarter to. She half turned, and there she saw the square of light on the table. But as from a temptation she turned quickly away, and began again: 'Our Father....'

CHAPTER II

I

THE first time that Herbert Soennecke had had to make a speech in public – he was then twenty-two years old and a member of the trades union congress as delegate for the metal workers – an older comrade had asked him:

'Have you decided what you're going to say?'

He had answered:

'Yes, I have. I'll tell them how things are now, how they should be and how to set about it so that things shall be the way they should be.'

As in all other matters Soennecke had remained true to himself in following this method. His life hadn't passed, he'd led it. That was why it seemed to him, looking back over his forty-seven years, such a simple one and indeed so obvious. Life had never taken him by surprise. What happened to him he had, in general, foreseen. Soennecke often said, and was fully convinced that it was true:

'I'm a simple chap.'

Once when he was listening to Doino talking about the importance

of a man's relationship with himself, he had shaken his head in astonishment. All the same, that night, when he thought about it again, he found that he had always maintained a good and, so to speak, objectively friendly relationship with himself.

The increasingly stronger part that he played in the movement had in no way altered his way of living. Trades union activities, strikes, incidents of the war, prison, civil war, illegality – all that was life and not exceptional experiences; it was progressive clarification and not confusion.

There were a few 'dark episodes' as he called them: experiences which were no longer important, were over and done with, and which yet sometimes – unexpected and unforeseen – came back to mind so forcibly that they asserted a domination as though they formed part of a perpetual present.

There was the meeting during his first leave from the front with the woman who led the movement. He had known her for a long time and had respected her from the first. Yet this was the first occasion on which he had been alone with her. She had long been in bed with a sickness from which she had only recently recovered; she was still very weak, and once, for no reason, she burst into tears.

He had had to tell her a lot about the front, how men out there lived and died. She suddenly interrupted him, took both his hands in hers and said:

'Nothing must happen to you, comrade, do you hear? We all need you so desperately.'

He had been extremely embarrassed, blushed perhaps, and turned his head away. How much had happened since then! He had often seen her again, had spent days and nights of the revolutionary period in her company, yet each time when – on the anniversary of her death – he had had to address countless thousands at her grave, the pointless memory had returned to make his voice uncertain. He thought of her very frequently during that internal struggle for power in which he had gone down because he had refused to fight: that was the time when it was being decided who should lead the German Party, when it became increasingly clear that the answer would be given outside the country and the decision handed down. Then it would happen that suddenly he would seem to see her long, un-beautiful face, with the beautiful, large, good-eyes. Then he might think: 'That woman decided. But you people take no notice.' And he would fall silent in the middle of a sentence. 'Soennecke is being defeated through his own silence,' some of his friends would say, with

growing impatience, for they had hitched their ambitions to him and were afraid of disappearing with him in the shadows cast by the new chiefs. Later, others said, 'Soennecke didn't speak up. He was smart. What's happened to the other friends, the closest comrades in arms, of that great woman? Men whom the German Party still boasts about? All disappeared, all scattered like chaff. Only Soennecke is left because he knew how to hold his tongue.'

And later still, when it was a matter of a definite, noisy break with those old comrades in arms, Soennecke didn't falter. In accordance with the Party resolutions he made complaints about them which gradually assumed the dimensions of appalling accusations. Thus Soennecke not only knew how to keep silent, he had also learned how to listen. On occasions that recurrent memory seemed to him to give those 'dark periods', normally as inexplicable as an accident or a physical caprice, a meaning that he could grasp. And on those occasions that minute memory, which popped up as it were of its own volition, threatened to confuse him.

Other 'dark periods' were connected with equally unimportant events, whose flickering echo they were. For example, there was the incident in front of the station in Leningrad. A man, very shabbily dressed, had stepped off the pavement on to the tram-line. He hadn't heard the tram's warning bell. Then a policeman hurled himself at the man and began to pummel the back of his neck and his shoulders with his fists. The man turned towards the policeman. Soennecke had seen the indescribably painful amazement on the undernourished face. It soon disappeared beneath the grey woollen gloves that covered the policeman's fists. Evening was just falling: Soennecke saw the two men, the gloved fists and the starved face, in the last, sharp light of the soft autumn day. That morning he had visited a large children's community in what had formerly been the czar's village, later he had seen a new House of Culture, and in his hotel he had found a letter from Irma. She had written to say that she loved him. And he was forty-five, years old and had come to believe that he would never love again. And Irma had written that she wanted to join him immediately. He had at once arranged everything so that she could come without delay.

And he had written to her: 'Today I went out to see the children - what a country! I got your letter today - what a day! We'll be together in this land - what a life!'

And now those fists and that face - he wanted to do something to intervene at once. And why didn't the passers-by do something? Why didn't the man defend himself?

He took a few steps and then stopped. The policeman let the man go; he walked away with hunched shoulders; the tram went on. No one seemed at all surprised at what had happened.

Soennecke decided to report the appalling incident to the proper authorities. He didn't do so, he mentioned it to no one, it became his secret. Yet when a few months later – with many others, foreign writers, artists, workers' leaders – he was a guest of the old writer at an excessively fine and luxurious reception, and the old man had led him to a quiet corner, he had told him – and he didn't know why his heart beat so – about what had happened that evening in Leningrad. After a while the poet of the poor and the barefooted, the insulted and the beaten had replied:

'Yes, yes, it's wonderful to see how everything's getting better and better in our glorious land.' He hadn't listened.

No, great events never worried Soennecke. Even when, on occasion, they were a ghastly disappointment they remained clear and transparent.

'You've got a fine nose for facts, still you don't smell anything you don't want to,' an altogether too clever secretary of Classen's had once said to him.

'You're wrong there,' Soennecke had answered rapidly: 'Some facts have a smell which is too strong for even the most insensitive nose.'

He had immediately regretted this reply of his. For this was just the time when the internal struggle for power had become most unpredictable, and the men involved were pursuing their ambitions through intensely tortuous channels. In certain circumstances even compliments could be formidable weapons.

Once, during an argument over the problem of the trades unions, when the subject under discussion was the definite expulsion of the so-called conciliators from the Party and the subsequent defamation of their characters, somebody said to Soennecke:

'You've one fault. You're too good, too good a friend!'

This, too, was a dangerous compliment. That was one of the 'new men'; he'd achieved his present condition outside the country, and he was fond of finishing his sentences, provocatively, with the Russian words: '*wot chto!*' During meetings he never seemed to listen at all, writing while the others spoke, preferably for some unfathomable reason on very small pieces of paper. This very dangerous compliment asked for a stinging retort, but then something happened which surprised Soennecke as much as the 'new men', the '*wot chto!*' people. He said in a low voice:

'The house where we lived was on the edge of an industrialised village. There was a deep ditch nearby where all the town garbage was dumped. That's where I spent my childhood. Almost every night I was woken up by latecomers bringing their refuse and throwing it in there. Later the dogs came and fought over the scraps. I still often think of the smell, it was quite indescribable. They say that what you experience as a child stays with you all your life. That's when my revolutionary career began. I couldn't bear living among dung, and I've never forgotten that. I didn't need any course at the Lenin School to reach that conclusion. I just wanted to tell you that.'

He had spoken foolishly without really producing an answer, as he realised at once. This was one occasion on which a 'dark period' had been brought into light. After that Soennecke had become increasingly careful, and even acquired the habit, from time to time, of ending his sentences '*wot chto*'.

So he gave in, almost without being aware of what he was doing. He had no fear of losing himself, for he was very sure of himself. His strength didn't depend on the position he was given, as he well knew.

Even long ago, in the early years, he had only to work in a factory for a short time before – without his doing anything or making any attempt to draw attention to himself – the other men would become attached to him, at first just a few but soon more and more of them. During the short midday pause, when each man read his paper while eating his lunch, if anything interesting had happened, anything that concerned the proletariat, though each man would air his views, they all felt that what they said was simply a preliminary; they were waiting to hear Soennecke's opinion. It seemed natural that he shouldn't push himself forward, that sometimes he'd wait until the end of the rest period and only say what he thought, in his usual calm manner, just as they were going back to their benches. When it came to a vote – the union wasn't all that it might have been – they came to him, one by one, after work. Soennecke would still be cleaning and arranging his tools, for he always left his place as tidy as if he were expecting a strict inspection during the night. He didn't talk much, he didn't have to; and they all liked him for that; they said he knew what was what, what should be done and what shouldn't; he was no windbag.

Young Soennecke observed, painfully, how much his fellows expected of him, he felt they over-estimated him, and so he began to read. He didn't want to disappoint them in their expectations. The more he read and learned, the more aware he became of his own ignorance. Each pamphlet told the hungry reader of countless others,

each book of other books that he must read. Soennecke soon forgot the question which to begin with had so immeasurably troubled him: 'What draws people to me? Why, without trying to do so, do I inspire them with trust in me?'

During his years of travel this experience repeated itself; in every factory, after being there only a few weeks, he found himself the centre. And even in Esbjerg, where at first he couldn't even speak the language, it was the same story. And when he came back to Germany and was, with increasing frequency, chosen as spokesman by his fellow-workers, it seemed to him as to the others quite a natural state of affairs. He hadn't asked for leadership, but there it was like life itself, his hard, working-man's life.

Yet it was only during the war, during the three years he spent at the front and the final year and a half in Berlin, that Soennecke became aware that his destiny lay in the attitude of others towards him. From that time on he knew that it was no longer in his power to decide whether he wished to lead or to be one of the many. He had been chosen and he knew the men who had made the choice.

A few weeks after the outbreak of war he had been marked P.S. - 'politically suspect' - and taken from his factory and sent to the front. He was never for long in the same unit, yet in every trench whether on the western front, the eastern, or down in the south, it was the same story as in the factories. Everywhere the officers, who had been informed that Private Soennecke was P.S., noticed that something like a court came to surround this wiry little man, this skilled metal-turner. He was a good soldier, they had no complaints to make against him on that score; he was cool-headed and undoubtedly brave, even being recommended for the Iron Cross. Yet there was something wrong. Non-commissioned officers, specially instructed to find out what he was up to, soon gave up. This P.S. did nothing suspect. All the same it was easier to get on with the troops if one was in Soennecke's good graces. Naturally back in barracks such a state of affairs would have been unheard of or even scandalous, but at the front everything was topsy turvy. And Soennecke wasn't just known in his own platoon or even in his own company; at quiet moments soldiers from all over the battalion would come to have a chat with him. This way the whole battalion learned about things of which they would otherwise never have heard. The censorship units, specially alerted, could find nothing suspect in the letters which Soennecke received from home, yet it was decided to hold them up for considerable periods of time. For weeks on end Soennecke received no post, and despite this he appeared to be

as well informed as ever about current events both at home and abroad. It could be that men returning from leave or wounded coming from the hospitals brought him secret messages. But they couldn't very well cancel all leave on that account.

Their superiors often heard the soldiers, when they thought there was no one about, quoting some remark of 'Kumpel's'. That was the nickname they'd given Soennecke.

One night – for the last forty-eight hours their trench had been under heavy artillery fire – there was a shout of 'Kumpel! Kumpel!' It was their captain's voice, who was acting as battalion commander. A regular officer, he wasn't popular, but the men respected him, especially when things were a bit lively. They knew that he was always in front, the first out of the trench in an assault. They said of him that his unusually long, thin appearance put the wind up the enemy. Now he stood in front of Soennecke, bellowing: 'Kumpel'. Soennecke stood, like the others who were awake and could still stand, at attention, but he made no sign of recognising his nickname.

'Why don't you answer me when I call you, Kumpel?' shouted the captain.

'Private Herbert Soennecke, present and correct, sir. My name is not Kumpel.'

'But that's what you're called.'

'Only by my friends.'

'Am I your enemy? Answer!' And, as Soennecke said nothing, 'That's an order.'

'Sir! You're the captain, sir.'

'All right. Not a very clever answer. Stand easy. They say Kumpel says the war will never end. Is that so?'

'Wars don't end. They have to be finished.'

'Who finishes them? What does Kumpel think?'

'Sometimes the same men who start them. Sometimes quite different people.'

'The Kumpels, perhaps? Answer. That's an order.'

'Yes, sir, the Kumpels perhaps.'

'And what if we get rid of all the Kumpels first?'

'There are millions of them.'

'No, you're wrong there. On this sector of the front there's only one.'

'If he should go, there'd be another.'

'That remains to be seen. In any case, we'd get rid of him too.'

And the captain ordered the platoon commander to send out a

patrol for the purpose of bringing back a prisoner from the enemy trenches. 'Naturally Kumpel will be included.'

Soennecke was the only member of the patrol to return. He brought a prisoner with him, who had helped him carry back a wounded comrade.

The captain sent in a second and very strong recommendation that Soennecke be awarded the Iron Cross.

Now, though there might be the occasional dark periods, Soennecke, looking back over his life, was aware of one bright patch, one well-lit stretch that he had lived. And if now he should give in, he didn't feel that anything much could happen to him since he wasn't alone. He remained aware that men would always group themselves around him. Men were faithful to others because they represented the Party, whereas they were faithful to him because he had remained unchanged and they were faithful to the Party because of him. Those who began to doubt didn't drift away. They said: 'Soennecke's there, so it can still all turn out for the best.'

And his old comrades in arms, expelled or 'suspended', grown bitter and silent, thought at times when they badly needed consolation: 'If ever it really gets serious, then Herbert Soennecke will be at the head again, and he'll send for us.'

And Soennecke had sent for many of them when the best cadres of the Party were struck down. One evening he might suddenly appear in the home of such a 'suspended' man. The latter easily recognised him, though Soennecke had shaved off his moustache and changed his spectacles, for he was exactly the Herbert of 1918, he was Kumpel. He could say:

'Now, Fritz, we need real men again. We men who did the *Spartakus* business together, we know what's what. We haven't forgotten, eh, Fritz?'

And Fritz might answer, hesitantly:

'No, Herbert, you're right there. We haven't forgotten. Neither the days when Rosa and Karl were the leaders, no, nor the dirty years when we weren't wanted. You made the mistakes along with the others, and we have to reap the bitter harvest.'

During the whole long period in between, living only a few houses away from one another, they had never met. Now here was Herbert again, and he wanted something. It wasn't as simple as all that; first of all there was a lot of explaining to be done. Probably he had nowhere to spend the night, well he could always sleep here. And that way there was time to feel one's way about, to find the old friend again in the

other man and to admit to oneself bit by bit that one had found him. But as for this damned, wrong, eternal Party line: no, Fritz couldn't accept that. Still, the night was long – Fritzy's wife and children had long been asleep – they sat in the kitchen and it was the same old Herbert, he'd never really become one of the 'bosses'. Those others, they might discard a man and slander him, but old Herbert, he knew what a chap was really worth. It wasn't so much a question of the Party now, it was a fight for life or death, that was clear enough, and after all one belonged to the old guard, the real *Spartakus*.

Then Herbert would disappear for weeks on end, but one knew so surely that he was there, as surely as if he were standing by one's side, when one smuggled the leaflets into the factory washroom.

2

Some time after the departure of his children for Russia, Soennecke met his wife. It had been so arranged that up to the last she was unaware that she was going to see him. It was at the dentist's who had offered to make her the bridge she so badly needed on credit. The fourth time she went there she saw Herbert.

She could find no words to say and could only gaze at him, sitting there, grown thin and looking so different from the way he had. He was clean-shaven, and when he smiled it was as it had been many years before.

'You've nothing to say, Herta?'

She sat down in the armchair opposite him. So there he was, still alive.

'Are you in Berlin all the time?' she asked

'No. Sometimes here, sometimes there.'

'You don't look well. You're not being careful enough with yourself. Have you no one to look after you properly?'

'Irma's not in Germany. She emigrated.'

'Yes,' said Herta, and for the first time since she had seen him she looked away. 'It's quiet at home now, without the children. I thought of letting two of the rooms. The little one and the kitchen are all I need. What do you think, Herbert?'

'Whatever you do, it'll be right. You always were a clever woman, and knew how to do things properly. You've been a good friend to me, Herta, in the good times and in the bad ones too.'

'You're talking as though this were the last time we'll see one another.'

'Perhaps it is.'

After a pause she said:

'Sometimes I think it would have been better for us and the children if you'd stayed a simple working man. But it was fated otherwise.'

'You're talking, Herta, as though you weren't a communist.'

'I don't even know myself what I am. I had a husband, he's gone. I had children, they're gone. What am I now?' She went on: 'I sent your suits to the cleaners. The dark-blue one's as good as new now. If you should be needing it after all . . .'

Soennecke told her how the Party was gradually becoming powerful again, while disillusionment with the régime was mounting like a tide. Perhaps it wouldn't be long before there was a drastic change. He talked a lot, and, what was unusually for him, fast; anything to stop the conversation from getting back to his freshly-cleaned suits or his newly-darned socks. While he talked he noticed that there was something new in Herta's attitude, something which disturbed him. She held her hands clasped in her lap, and seemed to keep staring at them. Then she said:

'Do you remember the day we met, that May Day? And then in December we were married. That was '13. So I've known you for over twenty years now, Soennecke.'

'At that time, twenty years ago, you used to say that one more shove and it would all be changed. In the summer of '14 you said the working class will never allow a war. In the winter of '17, when you came out of hospital, you said it was really about to start in earnest, the last battle was about to begin. In 1923, week after week, you said: "It can break out tomorrow and then this foul system will be done for." You said that that was the final crisis, that German capitalism could never survive it. And now you say the Party's getting stronger and Hitler's on the way out. You've been wrong for twenty years, you've always been with those who took the hardest knocks. It's a miracle you're still alive. And now you'll say that my father was an old reformer and that in my heart of hearts I've remained a reformer too. It's not true. But for a long time now I haven't had the strength left to go on always believing, always hoping.'

'What are twenty years?' said Soennecke, as though talking to himself. 'Twenty years is nothing in the history of the world.'

'I've got nothing to do with world history, but these twenty years, they're almost my whole life. There won't be many more.'

'You're forgetting the children,' he cried.

'No, I'm not. I send them food packages whenever I have a little

money to buy them. It seems they don't really get enough to eat over there.

Time was pressing; their conversation had got out of hand; he had seen her, and now he must go. He would have liked to say: 'Herta, if I've hurt you in the past few years, forgive me. No woman will ever mean as much to me as you have meant.' But the way she sat there she was a strange woman, far more remote from him than, say, Josmar.

As he held out his hand to her in farewell – she remained seated and seemed to want to stay where she was – she said:

'If one day you've had enough of it... You always were a good workman, and you're not too old... In the old days you liked Denmark very much... We could go there and send for the children and start a new life like a proper proletarian family.'

He nodded his head. He had to hurry away.

3

He still had a lot to do. Two important meetings, even though each of them would only last a few minutes, would take up his whole evening. He'd arranged for Max to be at a big café in the centre of the city and for the engineer to be in a church in Schlachtensee. During the night he was planning to draft a long report which the people outside had been waiting for for weeks.

He couldn't find a taxi. It wasn't dangerous for him to walk through this expensive residential district, since he knew no one here. During the *Spartakus* period many people around here used to frighten their children with his name. Now those children had become men and it wasn't possible to frighten them with anything any more. They had become the shock troops of the new power. In their well-cut black uniforms they were its firmest support, the heroes of a civil war that had been won too easily since they were the only ones who had used their guns. 'They'd have been easy to deal with if we'd been armed too, for they couldn't imagine that the other side might also have weapons. They thought that they'd invented violence. Those lads won't make old bones,' Soennecke thought, without hatred and without emotion. He was an old soldier. An old soldier doesn't hate or despise the enemy; he knows that the enemy has mortal weakness because he's aware that he himself has mortal weaknesses which constantly threaten his destruction. That's why he'd written in his obituary of the comrades killed near Potsdam: 'To fight means to wait

a hundred hours for the minute in which one can strike one's blow. Cowards can't wait: they strike out because they are less afraid of the enemy than of their own fear; thus they put themselves in a false and dangerous position. A true revolutionary knows how to wait. He can control his hatred. He can master his thirst for righteous vengeance.'

When the leaders outside read this proclamation they disapproved of it. One of the younger men, a *wot chto*, remarked:

'Dangerous, highly dangerous! It reeks of conciliationism, if of nothing worse. Wait? The régime is rotten: it can be knocked over at any minute; and Soennecke talks of waiting. To speak of it in the same breath as the need for choosing one's own moment to strike, that doesn't make it any better. He's too sly, that Soennecke, but still he's not sly enough. He justifies the Party line and contradicts the extreme left who accuse us of having given in to Hitler without a struggle. But in the first place we don't need to be justified, though perhaps Soennecke does, because he's not so thoroughly convinced as he pretends to be. In the second place we withdrew a step in 1913 in order to be in a better position to strike now. Soennecke would have the Party retreat for "a hundred hours". That, comrades, is not a step, it's not a strategic withdrawal, it's capitulation, it's liquidation.'

The young man had a great deal more to say: He got up to 'in the eighth place'. The others, mostly old comrades, listened to him attentively. The young man had just arrived from 'over there', from Moscow. If he could attack Soennecke so forcibly, it could mean one thing, that the latter's position was shaky 'up there', in high Moscow circles. They agreed with the young man's proposal that Soennecke's obituary proclamation should not be published. It was a deviation, and as such its propagation must be stopped.

Soennecke knew of this meeting and in the report that he would write that night he intended to make his position clear. Before the encounter with Herta it had all seemed quite plain to him, he'd arranged his ideas and had decided on which points he would give way and where he would attack.

Now, walking through these extraordinarily dead and overclean streets, where the lights were already lit though it was not yet fully evening, he would have liked to talk to himself out loud, for he had mentally embarked on a dialogue without noticing it.

He oughtn't to have let Herta say all those things she'd thought up in her loneliness; he should have answered her. And yet it was apparent now that his report must take a form other than the one which he'd planned. And, as though there were a connection, hard to recognise as

such and yet almost tangible, between Herta's conversation and the unwritten report, Soennecke now perceived clearly that he must give those rear echelon heroes his opinion in a way that would be courageous, aggressive and even provocative. Yet what was his opinion? The régime wasn't rotten; on the contrary it was visibly becoming more firmly established every day; those fellows knew exactly what they wanted and they possessed both the energy and the strength of purpose to go to extremes to get it. 'They have youth on their side, and the children belong to them too. We, on the other hand, are no longer in a position to find a replacement for each fighter we lose. We can stop people from forgetting us, but we can't stop the nation from living as though we no longer existed. We are commentators, and our commentaries become increasingly smothered, smothered because our numbers are shrinking; because the grip round our throat is growing tighter; because we are alone; because we are without youth.'

'Herta realised that that was so. She'd have spoken differently if I'd told her what I really think. She understands because she's alive. We, on the other hand, are no longer living our lives, we are, for a certain length of time, surviving our death.'

Soennecke stopped; he had been walking too fast and he felt the pain in his chest again. It was all rubbish, untrue, stupid. It was exhaustion, due to the sleepless nights which had lately come too close together. The Party lives on. The Party's dead live on. And so the numbers don't diminish. He who has the laws of history on his side cannot go under.

He walked on slowly, and the stabbing pain diminished. He found a taxi near the underground station. The chauffeur explained that he'd have to take a roundabout route on account of the mass demonstration and march past for which the crowds were already assembling. Whole streets were closed to traffic.

Only then did Soennecke remember. It was just one year since they'd come to power. Only one year. It was the longest of all his forty-seven. It had aged him fantastically. He had outlived too many of his comrades. Without his really noticing it, these dead friends had become the companions of his solitude. He only gradually understood that this was the age that cannot be measured in years and that does not teach a man how to die. Was one the graveyard in which they were buried, or the watcher who tended their graves, or had one outlived them in order to revenge them and to bear witness on their behalf?

Following a roundabout route the car neared its destination.

Soennecke was afraid he might be late. At this hour the second year began, and he should be on time for it.

The café was almost empty. From where he sat Soennecke had a view of both the entrances. And he was close to one of the doors, curtained in a heavy red material, that led to an emergency exit of whose existence few people were aware.

The rhythmical noise was at first dull and scarcely audible, but from minute to minute it became clearer. The march had begun. If Max was on time, Soennecke would be able to get out before the crowds blocked the streets. The beer wasn't cold enough; in this high-class joint the chairs were better than the drinks. The high-class people thought they were being well served if they had to pay high prices. They even needed servants to taste their food to make sure it was good.

Soennecke could only wait three more minutes. He glanced round for the waiter. Then he was conscious that he was being watched. Max stood in the doorway. He dropped his eyes as soon as Soennecke had seen him, crossed the room and sat down near the other exit. Soennecke lifted his mug of beer to his lips. He had no need to look around. He knew that Max had talked and that he'd brought them here so that they could get on Soennecke's trail. Yet by this time Max was holding out on them. He wouldn't betray him.

The first section, marching this way, must be quite close. They marched well; the masses are pleased when they can't distinguish one footfall from among the others. *In gleichem Schritt und Tritt.* Yet Soennecke heard nothing, the singing in his ears was too strong. He knew that meant fear.

He picked up the evening paper and tried to read it, but couldn't. He suddenly felt his feet go cold. There was no point in waiting. He got up slowly and threw a five-mark piece on the table. When the waiter came over he asked him the way to the lavatory. As he went down the stairs he was conscious of eyes watching his back. He couldn't hear if he was being followed as the steps to the lavatory were carpeted. At the bottom he looked around: he was alone. To the left there was an unlit passage. At the end he found a boarded-up window, at breast height. He lifted the wooden cover from off its stanchions. He dropped into a dark room, knocking against something as he did so. There was a circular staircase. When he climbed up it he realised where he was, in the corridor behind the door with the curtains. He wanted to run, but his knees were knocking. He felt his way forward slowly until he reached the communicating stairs. He stopped and

listened. He wasn't being followed. He had time. He mustn't be out of breath when he got outside. He went step by step. He took the rolled-up hat out of the inside pocket of his overcoat and put it on his head. He took off his spectacles, pinned the ribbon of the Iron Cross on his chest and stuck the Party button with the swastika in his buttonhole. It seemed to him that there was no need for him to concentrate on these actions; they were automatic, for he had so often foreseen just such a situation and just such action.

When at last he reached the street he looked in vain for a sensation of release. He didn't glance round, yet he felt that he was being observed. The danger wasn't over, the flight now began in earnest. He walked straight forward, listening to the footsteps behind him. They remained equally distant, whether he went slowly or fast. He stopped and the man who was following came closer. When he was very near Soennecke turned sharply towards him. The other man walked straight on, hardly seeming to notice him.

The noise of the approaching crowd filled the air, coming from all sides, yet only now did Soennecke notice it. He walked slowly towards the Friedrichstrasse. No, the danger wasn't past; the enemy might appear from any doorway. There, there they were at the street corner, two men with little Max caught between them. Near by were three other men, one of them holding the hat that Soennecke had left behind in the café. They hadn't noticed him yet and he slipped down a side turning, and suddenly there were the marchers; it was no longer units in uniform, it was the people marching by. It was easy to slip in among them, for the ranks weren't closed. He quickly fell in step, staring ahead of him, shouting and singing with the others. He no longer felt cold; it was as though warmth reached him from the countless torches carried at the head of the column.

The column stopped, though they hadn't yet arrived. Soennecke saw the Gestapo men, running along the flank of the procession, one of them waving the grey hat as though it were a recognition signal.

Now at last the column had debouched into the great open square. Looking around, one saw that there might well be hundreds of thousands of people in the gigantic place, encircled by banners, lit by the flickering torches; no individual could get out of here. From loudspeakers the overloud and brutal music of brass bands poured down on them. It was answered by shouts. Sometimes it seemed to Soennecke as though all those shouts formed one single, tangible entity. This *sieg heil* stood in the air, powerful and threatening above their heads, until driven away by the renewed din from the

loudspeakers. So it was only at the second attempt that he understood what his neighbour, a raddled ageing spinster, was saying.

'What do you think? You're obviously a party member.'

He looked at her in amazement. He had difficulty in understanding what she was saying. Apparently everyone in this row lived in the same building.

'And there's Frau Bohnen, whose son was killed by the reds, at least that's what they think, at any rate he was a Storm Trooper and was killed on duty. And they just leave her to march like this in her ordinary place. Whereas all the others who've made sacrifices, they get up in front, and get special honours everywhere, their picture in the paper, financial assistance, flowers on the anniversary of the bereavement. And Frau Bohnen, she's not so young any more and she's never had much luck, because of her being so shy all the time, and having lost her husband in the war too, and no one raises a finger to give her a bit of a show. After all, everyone's got their rights, isn't that so? And having had her son fall for the movement, nobody'll bring him back to life for her. Eh? Not even the Führer.'

Soennecke said:

'Yes, if the Führer knew about it . . .'

She nodded in emphatic agreement, and an old man, who was somewhat hard of hearing, put in:

'That's just what I was saying, my very words. If the Führer knew about it . . .'

The shouting grew louder now, the *sieg heils* more and more menacing. Everyone was staring at the spotlit white balcony and at the little man who stood there, surrounded by uniformed figures, his right hand raised in a careless salute. He opened his mouth, but nothing could be heard for the shouting. The man didn't close his mouth and his face seemed to disappear behind this extraordinarily wide cavern. Only after some time could his soft, insinuating voice be heard, dripping like a warm summer rain on to the audience below.

'From that balcony, standing exactly where that man's now standing, Scheidemann proclaimed the republic. That was sixteen years ago. We wrecked it. If we hadn't, he wouldn't be standing up there now. But we didn't spend our time asleep either. They didn't believe in us. They preferred to believe in him. Why? Those young fellows up front there, they're devoted to him, they didn't care for us. Simply because they didn't believe we'd win. And now they believe that they have won. They don't know that the battle's not even been joined yet. They've got to wash their eyes in blood before they can learn how to see.'

For the first time in many years Soennecke's thoughts went back to the war. He was Kumpel again. Memories sprang up and moved him so deeply that he only heard the shouts and songs about him as from a great distance. The huge, nervous spasm that went through the crowd when their God appeared in flesh and blood before them didn't touch him. He saw the white patch with the black stripe across the middle and wondered as though calculating coldly from this too distant face: 'Four years. Five. And if it were to be ten? Herta's wrong, the Party's right. The régime is rotten; the Empire was rotten when the war started, yet it looked strong enough to last through all eternity.'

He looked about him. There was Frau Bohnen; she, too, was staring up at the white light in front. Yet she was tired. A working-class woman. If only the Führer knew... But he didn't know. But we'll know, Frau Bohnen, we'll know!

4

He rang again. There must be somebody at home, for the ground floor room was lit up, the light streaming through the thin curtains out into the front garden. He pushed open the gate and stood for a moment, undecided, on the narrow path. There was no point in waiting here, wringing wet; he'd better risk it. So he walked up to the door of the house, and since there was no answer to his knock he pressed the latch and immediately found himself in a long, wide room. At the far end he saw Ilming, standing with his back turned, talking excitedly into the telephone. Soennecke attempted to make his presence known, but Ilming was shouting rather than talking. He tried to convince someone he sometimes called, tenderly, Johnny, and sometimes, roughly, Hans, to come to his house at once. He explained with insistence that everything depended on this, whether the future was to be a happy one, or whether they were to break with dangerous consequences, a danger that he didn't specify but that was unavoidable.

Soennecke waited. He was tired and would have liked to sit down, but he decided that it would be better to wait and see how the man received him.

Ilming didn't seem to be getting anywhere. He had stopped threatening and was now speaking sadly; the obscene terms of endearment which he murmured into the telephone sounded merely ridiculous and pathetic at the same time. Suddenly he cried: 'Wait a minute!' but the

other had apparently hung up. He threw the earpiece back on its hook and said, without turning round:

'Who's there?'

Soennecke crossed the room, and from under the huge standing lamp that flooded the room with grey-white, indirect lighting, said:

'Turn round. I don't know if you'll recognise me.'

Ilming looked at him for a long time. It was as though he was trying, during this long-drawn-out moment, to find among many faces the one that would be the most suitable for greeting the intruder. At last he spoke:

'You are Herbert Soennecke, if my highly reliable memory doesn't deceive me. You have changed very little since we last met - is it two years ago? The lieutenant who introduced us hanged himself while escaping. You, apparently, are still alive.'

'I need shelter for the night,' Soennecke said.

'And you have come to the enemy for it. You have, to put it mildly, a nerve. What, in fact, do you expect of me, sir comrade?'

It was obvious that the man was undecided; if one just let him talk long enough he'd agree, thankful to have someone to listen to him; and also he'd be intrigued by the enormity of the idea that he, the poet of steel romanticism, the trumpeter of the new power, should extend his hospitality to the leader of the communists. A unique experience was thrust on him in his own home. Soon Soennecke was able to take off his overcoat and sit down. Ilming had a good deal to say.

Jochen von Ilming, who in official documents was simply called Fritz Mueller, had spent his first seventeen years in the style of his middle-class parents, an unexceptional life, orderly as life was before the war in the small, central German town of his birth. In the war, for which he had volunteered, he became a hero. The collapse took him by surprise, yet nothing that subsequently happened gave him cause to forget his heroism. He forgot the horrors among which he had won his spurs and found words to express an experience from which everything had been deleted save superhuman strength, contempt for death through the comradeship of the living, the fighters, and an unconquerable, inextinguishable urge towards victory. When Fritz Mueller discovered that he was a poet he became metamorphosed into Jochen von Ilming. And von Ilming found people to encourage him, to make a career for him, and finally he found a political movement which, while relying chiefly on trumpets for its recruiting music, was yet willing to welcome the steel nightingale. Ilming accepted no allegiance to anyone. Therefore, many men tried to win him over, maintaining

that his presence in the enemy camp was due to a misunderstanding, perhaps to ignorance on the part of the blunt warrior. They were wrong, like that young lieutenant, a convert and a maker of converts, who had once brought Ilming to Soennecke. They were also wrong who only saw in von Ilming a far too vain version of Fritz Mueller, a semi-educated poetaster, an up-to-date version of the ‘stiff upper lip’ school of versifiers. Fritz Mueller had died in the assaults on Verdun, during one apocalyptic night in front of Douaumont to be exact. Von Ilming, the reincarnation, could do something that had been impossible for Mueller: he truly and arrogantly despised everything that frightened him. For he hadn’t lost the knowledge of fear; he now knew what a hero was and that he himself was a true one.

‘You let me talk and you say nothing. All the same, you must have something to say. Of all the communists you’re the only one I’ve always taken seriously. You know that: otherwise you wouldn’t have come here. Isn’t that so, Soennecke?’

They had already been sitting for close on an hour at the unusually long table near the stove, which Ilming kept tending with ritual gestures. It was unnecessary, since the house was centrally heated. Nor was it necessary to describe to Soennecke in such detail the English art of making tea, since his explanation was immediately followed by a practical demonstration of the art. All the same the tea was good, and very welcome after the many hours spent in the damp cold, the running about the town, and the endless ride on the tram.

‘Are you really interested to find out, Ilming, that the Party which you’ve proclaimed a hundred times dead, lives on, and will undoubtedly outlive you?’

‘People with cancer or T.B. live after a fashion too, until they die. I thought we were both perfectly well aware that such an existence can hardly be termed life,’ said Ilming, thrusting his head forward as though he expected to be told a secret. Soennecke answered thoughtfully, unable to take his eyes from the ray of light reflected in Ilming’s monocle.

‘The champion of heroism ought to know better than that, Ilming. In this country we revolutionaries are the only people living that life, which, judging by your writings at least, is the only sort that you regard as worth while. Trenches and assaults, I went through all that, too, Ilming, the same way you did. But that wasn’t heroism. What we’re doing now, we communists, this is the real test. I’d have thought you’d have realised that.’

‘Wait a minute! What inexcusably mixed ideas you have!’ Ilming cried out.

He had jumped up quickly, throwing off his red silk dressing-gown. Standing there, in his suede jacket buttoned up to the chin and in his dark-blue pyjama trousers, his face suddenly changed again; so it was true what was frequently said of him, that he resembled the death mask of Frederick the Great; and there he stood – naturally, apart from his pyjama trousers – the typical herald who calls men to battle, who intoxicates youth with words such as these:

'Woe to those who wait until the battl. summons them! We trample peace beneath' our boots; whenever we appear the battle is joined, the battle from which will come the answer to a question which may be simple but which is all that counts: to whom does this world belong? To him who has power in his fist. And to whom does the power belong? To him who loves it with the same frightful strength that is needed to grasp it. Ours is the strength, ours the power, ours the world, to smash to smithereens if, in our enormous thirst for battle, we should so wish. Germans, I see the hour approaching when the whole planet won't be big enough to hold you.'

Soennecke might have smiled at the trouble Ilming gave himself to assume a dramatic rôle. But he had long been aware, through confidential reports, of the part that this apparently grotesque personage had played in assassinations, murders after secret, illegal trials, and other such acts of violence. Though Ilming might be play-acting the entire time, rehearsing a prepared speech before a mirror while wondering whether such and such a decoration, pinned to his chest or hung around his neck, would best suit such and such a passage – yet with the same precision had Ilming prepared his dangerous undertakings and ensured their success. And while Ilming continued without stopping to spout out his bundles of words, neatly arranged in well-ordered sentences, still standing with his Frederickan profile turned towards his guest, Soennecke thought:

'This gas-bag is worth a hundred machine-guns. There are few comrades one could say as much for. He's got too high an opinion of himself, obviously, but all the same he doesn't realise just quite how dangerous he is.'

Bit by bit Ilming's enthusiasm faded. Now he turned back to face the table; with his left hand he gripped, as it were, the imaginary belt which his pose of the moment required but which unfortunately he wasn't wearing, while his right he raised high in the air.

'Indeed, you are the early Christians, come two thousand years too late. You are the anvil on which we are playfully trying out the hammer that we intend to use for greater ends. We cut you in pieces,

grind you into mincemeat, let loose our stupidest beasts against you; where are your acts of vengeance? Where are the concentration camps you've broken open? He who suffers is contemptible. So you have nowhere to sleep tonight, Soennecke? You could have had the presidential palace as your residence – you had only to seize your power and it was yours. But you're plebeians like the early Christians; they, too, didn't understand power; as soon as you're in any danger of getting it you get cold feet. What a good soldier and what a bad politician you are, Soennecke, homeless leaders!

He drew breath, and Soennecke said:

'You forget one small detail, it amounts' only to about one sixth of the land surface of the globe: the Soviet Union. Your feet get a bit chilly when you think about that, eh?

'The Soviet Union, or rather Russia, that alone is important. Everything else is balls. You remind me of the Montenegrins. They're a couple of thousand chaps, including the shepherds and highwaymen. If you ask them: "How many of you are there?" they usually answer: "A hundred and seventy million, including the Russians." Soennecke and Stalin are partners in power. You poor little chap, your real homeland is the earth under Djugashvili's feet, not here, not among our hills and valleys, our forests and lakes, our rivers, our factories, our – my God, Soennecke, what do you see in that enormous filthy Russia, whose Czars have recently changed their name as well as their title, which remains sunk in its Eurasian bastardy, even as we have remained true to our will to create out of a chaotic planet a German world, the cosmos, the box of jewels that the Greek tried to create and failed.'

'You know, Ilming, that all that is the most miserable rubbish. You'll never conquer the world. We have – seldom enough – won a war now and then, but we've never conquered another nation. We overthrew Imperial Rome? Spare me the Teutoberger Forest farce please. The Romans licked us whenever they could spare a little time from their civil wars to indulge in that entertainment. It wasn't those Germanic heroes of yours who brought about their downfall; our ancestors were the jackals who came after. To smash the world to smithereens, that you might succeed in doing, but as to creating a German world, no, you won't get far with that. Ilming, remember the World War; we weren't such terrible fellows; when we were in a foreign country we didn't behave so badly; we brought order and we were really very anxious to turn a chaotic world into a tidy German one. Have you forgotten how they hated us? If we communists don't succeed in overthrowing your people before you set out once again on your crusade

to create a German world, you'll be leading the German people into the most ghastly holocaust of all time. . . .

'I have lent my ear,' Ilming broke in, 'and I am not impressed. I told you of deeds that we are preparing, and you prophesy events which you can neither prevent nor bring about. For twenty years you have done your best — without success, it's true, which is something to your credit — to set in motion the bloodiest of civil wars, and now, all of a sudden, you can't bear the sight of blood. Times have changed, comrade!'

'A single finger-nail is too much to sacrifice for an imperialist war; ten million dead for the victory of the proletariat wouldn't be too high a price to pay; it would be worth while and would still have sense. It's the ends that count, as you know Ilming.'

'But I don't regard your ends as either attainable or worth attaining. Look at your beloved Soviet Union,' Ilming put in. 'Yet there's one thing we're agreed on, though your people and mine are on different sides of the fence: the ends excuse everything.'

Then hastily he began to speak in a secretive and yet oratorical manner about the unbeatable strength of the future German air force. This subject seemed to give him an almost sensual pleasure. He chanted rather than spoke. The statement that he was learning to fly, and had already made considerable progress, sounded like a declaration of love. When he remarked: 'You, Soennecke, have always attempted to enter into history from below. Yet the decision will come from above,' it sounded like an obscene play on words.

'They'll make their war and we won't be able to stop them. We're too weak and we'll stay that way for a long time to come.' The thought passed through Soennecke's head. He was hardly listening now. For the second time that day his memories had taken control of him. Once again he was lying in the shell crater, a hunk of mud stuck between his teeth. He had no idea how it had got into his mouth. At that time it had appeared to him as though his entire previous life had dropped away, as though he had never belonged to himself, never really existed, as though the sun had never shone and he had never done anything other than what he was doing now: running senselessly for his life and being alone and in danger, a danger whose beginning he had forgotten, so omnipresent was it, and which therefore could have no end.

Sonnecke stood up. It was already late and he wanted to write his report that night. In Ilming's house he was sure of not being surprised, and Josmar was to come here to fetch it. It was all quite clear now, a united front of all workers at any price, before it was too late. The

alarm must be sounded throughout the world. While the *wot chto's* were at loggerheads about the exact shade of meaning in one of their far too wordy theses, the people here were engaged in building aeroplanes that would dive from 15,000 feet and drop their bombs on a pin-pointed target. He hoped that the next time the people abroad made one of their jokes about the former Captain Goering's many uniforms, their laughter would stick in their throat.

5

The black uniform suited Josmar. He looked just like one of those men of the master race, characters of Ilming's strange dreams, amalgams of world domination and homosexual love.

'Everything go off all right?' Soennecke asked. He was glad to see the young man again. That up to now he had always reappeared was a recurring miracle. So many whom he sent out didn't come back.

Josmar looked around the room. The black hangings had a curiously oily appearance. On the wall opposite the door hung a sword of the Order of the Teutonic Knights, and on the other walls were photographs of naked young men. Yet he was full of things to tell Soennecke. So he began to make his report, which he had carefully thought out in his mind before coming here.

'You handled it all very well,' Soennecke said when he'd finished. 'As for the Erna Lüttge woman, don't let that bother you any more. She's dead. Whether the gas was accident or suicide there's no way of knowing. Obviously she'd become a bit weak in the head.'

'Good God, though, I might have prevented it. She was a pathetic creature, even if she was a traitor.'

'She wasn't a traitor. Albert had had it even before she opened her mouth.'

'Really? What do you mean?' Josmar asked. 'If that's so, I'm absolutely at sea. What was I doing there then, for heaven's sake....'

'Now wait a minute, Josmar. Stop fussing. I got the information too late. You'd already left. It was like this: apparently Albert had been playing politics on his own all the time, making a united front at any price, any sort of alliance provided they were directed against the Nazis. And he dragged his associates into this with him. The apparatus, when it got wind of what was going on, decided that he must be eliminated. But how do you get rid of a man in these circumstances?

He was ordered to go abroad, but refused. So he and his people were handed over. For some damned reason or other the apparatus found it convenient to put out the story that his girl had betrayed him. Do you get it now?"

'No, I don't. You said yourself that Albert was a first-rate comrade, beyond reproach, and that he was a great loss to us. Do you remember saying that to me before I set out?'

'Yes, I said it. I said it, true enough. But I was wrong. I made a mistake, see? It happens, eh?'

For the first time since he'd known Soennecke Josmar felt disagreeably repelled by his coarse Berlin accent. It didn't suit the content of their conversation. Yet when he looked at him he saw that Soennecke, too, was sad, that there was something wrong which he was trying to conceal. All the same, Josmar couldn't ask him what it was. The 'apparatus' was the name for an extremely secret organisation which has been set up by the Party police and the Party intelligence service. When the apparatus was mentioned it was best to keep one's curiosity to oneself. And over and above that, what point was there in going on about it? The wretched girl was dead. And he'd thought he was being so cunning, whereas in fact he'd been a proper fathead, and a murderer to boot.

After a while Soennecke said:

'I knew Albert from the beginning. He was always a good pal of mine. He had a head, too, with something in it. He was at Leuna. I never knew a man fight better. What will you? I had no way of knowing that the apparatus was acting over my head. It should take its orders from me, but the fellows out there decided otherwise. They've got a chap in the Gestapo, that's naturally very important, but in order to keep his job he's got to do a certain amount for the Gestapo. So he turns in Albert and his group. Two birds with one stone. On the one hand the Party gets rid of some people who were worrying it; and this fellow has consolidated his position on the other. Get it?'

'I get it,' Josmar answered. And he felt it was all unspeakably filthy, that he should never have had anything to do with such a business. He'd have liked to go out into the fresh winter morning and walk and walk and walk - away from everything and away from himself too. It was all so crooked. There he was, sitting in this ghastly room, wearing a uniform that some man had sweated into while shooting comrades 'trying to escape'. Even Soennecke was pathetic.

'You must realise, Josmar, that I don't care for this sort of thing any

more than you do. I'm sorry about Albert. I know him and I know the sort of chap he is. Once when we were withdrawing after one of our many skirmishes, he wouldn't let me out of sight, going behind me and covering my escape; he was a regular bullet-stopper. That's what he did for me. And if he's still alive and should think that I let him be handed over to the enemy like that, my God, Josmar, can't you see how I feel about it? But remember that if the Party doesn't stay united now, if we allow even the slightest slackening of control, then it's candles for us. Consciously, Albert certainly wasn't aware that he was doing anything wrong, but all the same he was beginning to build up a faction, and that in the strictest illegality. You must see how dangerous that could become. Who could have allowed such a state of affairs to go on? To whom could it have been allowed?"

"Yes, quite, but the means, my God! To choose that way to stop a man from becoming a danger!" Josmar interrupted.

"Do you really believe, Josmar, that we have much choice of the means we can use? You should know better than that, you particularly, after spending a whole year at my side and seeing everything that we have seen together."

Josmar asked for nothing better than to believe him. And it did him good to listen to Soennecke. It was true, too, that the means were beside the point; ultimately it was only the ends that mattered.

"Here's my report. You'll have to take it. Read it, and you'll understand better."

After he'd read it he said:

"But, Herbert, the line you suggest is exactly the one that Albert was liquidated for following."

"Exactly. Albert reasoned absolutely correctly and acted absolutely wrongly. I propose, whereas he attempted to follow a new line without reference to the Party."

"But if this was the right line?"

"It couldn't be the right line since it wasn't the Party line. Perhaps it will be the right one tomorrow if, in fact, the Party adopts it and makes it its own."

"Yes, I see," said Josmar, hesitantly. "In any case I think it's very clever of you to protest against arbitrary intervention by the apparatus."

"Clever? It may turn out to be the stupidest action of my whole life. Now get going. The jackanapes who owns this place'll be back soon."

Josmar settled down to the transcription of the report into a piano sonata. He forgot about Albert and Erna. Through minute alterations

to the text, which were permitted him, he could work in a few pretty tunes.

The next night he crossed the frontier on skis. Snow was falling so heavily that he couldn't help feeling as though he were tearing through innumerable white walls. So long as he went downhill he was heading in the right direction. He could have sworn that there was a scent of pines in the air. But there were no trees about here.

He had entirely forgotten the smell in Erna's Lüttge's room, he had entirely forgotten about Albert. He'd have liked to sing, but the steep descent took his breath away.

CHAPTER III

I

DID the windows really go on rattling for such a long time after each explosion, or was it that his ears retained the sound?

Professor Stetten listened, until he became aware that he was hanging on to the dying sound, unwilling to let it go, as a man might cling to the last, painful sensation that preserves his consciousness. Now it had become perfectly quiet again, and he turned towards the door. His wife was still standing there. This was another of her great days. In the past few years she seemed to have become decades younger.

'I am very old, madame. I shall give up dyeing my moustache.'

'I repeat, the children will be here in twenty-five minutes. And you haven't even begun to get ready,' she said. Her tight hand grasped the door knob as though it were a weapon..

'I am very old,' he said again, turning back to the window. 'When I look at you, I find it hard to recall that you were once my wife. It amazes me that we should address one another as *du*.'

The door closed; she had gone. Had those idiots simply fired a few rounds to see what effect their cannon shells would have on a city? Or had they now broken off for luncheon: it would remain to be seen whether the dinner hour would be regarded as equally sacrosanct.

Walter's wife invariably addressed him as Daddy; she passed him his dishes with special attention, always smiling tip at him while she did so, as if to remind him of some secret that they alone shared. Yes, Walter was a successful son; everything he undertook turned out well. A charm so specifically Prussian was bound to attract many party

bigwigs to the house, and the blonderess of his wife seemed a further assurance of a fine future for him, both in business and in his political career.

This time the professor's wife had taken pains to make sure that the meal was appropriate to the importance of the visitors. Stetten was enjoying his food and hardly bothered to listen to those others talking about the *Reich* and the *Führer*. When Walter asked him: 'Don't you agree, Daddy?' he replied amiably, 'Yes, yes. That's the way the world goes round.' Glancing up, he saw his wife looking at him with hostility. She alone knew that he had not been listening. Naturally after decades of marriage a woman gets to know her husband, even if she has never understood him. He gave himself away at once, for he was holding his fork too close to the prongs. That was an old trick of his; when he wanted to annoy her he forgot his table manners.

'I may not have heard you,' she said, 'but I think you forgot to thank Walter. It wasn't so easy, even for him, to get your communist Jew set free.'

'No, it wasn't easy. I know, because I had a hand in it,' said Walter's wife.

'Faber is free at last?' Stetten asked.

'Certainly. Five days ago. Do you mean to say I forgot to tell you?'

'So you've known it for five days. You've managed for five consecutive periods, of twenty-four hours each, to keep that knowledge from me?'

'You shouldn't have done that, Mama. We all know Daddy's infatuated with the fellow.'

The old woman could still blush; by examining her closely one could still detect the dimples in her cheeks. Stetten thought it should suffice that he despised her. To hate her for as long as he had already done was an exaggerated luxury.

'Forgive me, I shouldn't have forgotten. I'm sorry, Erich!' The sound of his Christian name again, after so many years, made Stetten smile. It would be nice if Dioh didn't always address him as professor.

Walter now related, with a wealth of detail, the trouble to which he had gone in order to get Faber set free. It was clear from his account that it was a masterly achievement on his part, one that only he, naturally assisted by his marvellous Marlies, could have managed. It had, as a matter of fact, transpired, more or less by chance, that this Faber was a far more dangerous and important figure in Red circles than had been originally thought. And even so, there was a great deal that wasn't known about him even now.

'In this particular case I was, as an exception, glad about this: otherwise, with the best will in the world, I couldn't have done as you wished.' And with these words Walter brought his story to an end.

Well, well, so this Walter, with all his limitations, had become a great personality, almost a 'prominent' as they say up there in the North. Stetten replied: 'I thank you both most deeply. I am greatly indebted to you.' He thought that he should thank them at greater length, but he just couldn't do it. Also he was already too deeply involved in his own thoughts about Dion and about the meeting between them that he intended to arrange for the very near future. So everything was all right again, better than ever, better than at any time since Einhard's death, for Doino he had saved. And he would keep him at his side, chain him to him if need be, never let him get away again. Everything regained its proper sense now; now he could write again, for he had a reader once more. He saw him, hunched over a manuscript, his almost lipless mouth tightly closed, his head bent forward, and in his eyes that alertness which had told his teacher at first glance that this was no ordinary pupil, that this was an unformed master who could become another self.

The gunfire started up again, but here the window-panes rattled less than in the study.

'In the Reich such a state of affairs could never arise,' he heard Walter saying.

'Anyhow, the Führer has no need to use force. He doesn't have to touch a hair of anyone's head,' Marlies put in. And the old woman declaimed: 'The Führer called, and all, all came.'

'By this cannonade the government is proving that it is no longer capable of maintaining order. But this is only a curtain-raiser. Austria's fate is decided. It's only a question of a few weeks, months at the most, before the Führer arrives in Vienna. All Austria awaits that day,' Walter added.

It sounded as though he were repeating a lesson he had learned by heart. Now the three of them had fallen silent, as if awaiting Stetten's comment on this lesson. The panes shook again, almost as though they were dancing a jig. Stetten slowly got to his feet and walked over to the window. The street was deserted. The snow of the morning had changed to a cold sleet. He felt their eyes on his back and knew that they were still waiting. His chin began to tremble: as he didn't wish them to see this, he addressed his words to the street below.

'Those idiots are shooting Austrian unity to pieces. That is bad

enough. But it would be even worse to live in an Austria that had become simply the eastern province, the *Ostmark*, of the Third Reich. For then we would really and truly have lost, once and for all, that World War into which the Prussians dragged us. . . .

'What do you mean? I don't understand a word of what you say. After all, we're all Germans, all one nation,' Marlies interrupted. Walter nodded in agreement. He himself had never had the courage openly to contradict his father.

'You're a Prussian: my lady wife is another, and so is her son, though technically he belongs here and not with your people. The Prussians have never understood that people don't enjoy being ruled by them. They've never seen why it is that they are only tolerable when they are powerless and that we . . .'

Marlies broke in again: 'But, Daddy, the Führer's an Austrian himself. Anyone who's read *Mein Kampf* . . .'

'Don't worry, my child, I've read that book. It would take a long time for you and your like to grasp what I have read into it. But it won't be a dull time, for meanwhile a world war will take place, as your Führer would say with his usual elegancy of style. You'll have the opportunity of being a hero's wife. And unless my memory plays me false, widow's weeds are very becoming to blonde ladies. You believe that you are starting something new, and that you will be proud to say that you were there. But you are neither starting anything nor finishing anything either, you're right in the middle of an old, old game - and you don't know it. The Prussians start with victories and finish with a shameful defeat, but it'll be the Germans who'll have to pay for it. As I say, it's an old game, and one that power-hungry imbeciles never tire of playing.'

'I don't understand,' Marlies cried sulkily.

'Of course you don't. That's exactly why you and your sort of people are prepared to play a part in it.'

In order to put an end to the conversation with 'those gramophone records', Stetten went at once to his study. And now that he was alone once again, he could allow his thoughts to return, uninterrupted, to Dion. But he wasn't alone, for the gunfire was loud and the windows rattled without pause. Naturally no solitude can exist in a city where men are being pulverised in their own homes in broad daylight. Dino would say that no solitude was possible so long as anywhere in the world men were robbed of their right to dignity and life.

Since he had given up writing he could no longer stop himself from thinking aloud. He had abandoned the attempt to do so. And since the

day on which he heard of Doino's arrest he had not written a word. This talking to himself, which he did more and more, had gradually become a dialogue with Dion, whose part he often also spoke aloud.

'Doino would say: "It was Archimedes, more than the murderers, who was responsible for his own death. Who else can one blame for the ignorance that drives men to murder, if not the wise men who know the truth?" Yet Dion was wrong, caught in the ridiculous snare of the age of enlightenment. The arrogant stupidity of apostles, who believe that they are awaited, that men are longing for their appearance! Just let them talk, they think to themselves, and everything will be put right. And men let them go on talking until they become intolerably wearisome. It's high time then for them to embrace martyrdom, for that is the only road to salvation that remains open for them. If Archimedes had offered the soldiers wine and a few drachmæ, there'd have been no murder. Dion's parallel is wrong, for the death of the absentminded professor wasn't necessary; it was a meaningless incident.'

There was a knock at the door and the woman came half into the room. Stetten didn't invite her to come any further. She knew that he never allowed her to penetrate beyond the threshold of his study – it had been that way ever since Einhard's death, eighteen years before.

'I'd like to apologise to you again. I can't understand how I could have forgotten to tell you.'

She hoped that he would interrupt her, but he remained silent.

'The ten thousand shillings you put at Walter's disposal to arrange for the freeing of the . . . of Mr Faber . . . there's still some of the money left. I felt you should . . . Marlies has been offered a fur coat at a very reasonable price . . . the money that's left would just be enough . . . you could make her a present of it. She's always so grateful for anything. . . .'

'Very well. I'll tell Walter when he brings me the account of the money he's spent.'

What was she waiting for now? It was wrong that he should hate her, that he should not forgive her because once – very long ago – he had desired her. She was probably neither more stupid nor worse than any of her sort.

He asked:

'Is there anything else I can do for you?'

'Why do you hate us, me and the children? What harm have we ever done you?' He looked at her with amazement. He hoped she didn't feel compelled to say everything that was on her mind.

‘I know there’s no point in my waiting for you to answer. You’ve always been particularly silent when you should have spoken. You’ve never cared for us, never really loved us. No, not even Einhard, at least not while he was alive. Don’t glare at me like that; I’m an old woman, and I’m not frightened any more, not by you or your appalling egotism. I’d spare your feelings if I thought you had any. Einhard became important to you as soon as he ceased to exist, because then he became your creation, a part of yourself and your solitude. I tell you don’t look at me like that; you don’t frighten me any more. I haven’t yet reached the stage where I can laugh at you – you’ve caused me too much suffering. Clever as you are, you’ve never dreamed how unpleasant it has been living near you, near a man who’s only ever wanted one thing in his life: to be right when everyone else is wrong. You’ve become intolerable to everyone. At one time or another a great many people have felt attracted to you – where are they now? They’ve escaped from you; not one of them wants to remember that he ever respected you or even liked you. They can hardly bear to think of you – and all this time I’ve gone on putting up with you. Do you know why you hang on to this Faber? Because he saw through you in time. You never caught him; he always slipped away; you’ve never succeeded in persuading him that he’s wrong and you’re right. My God, if you could see yourself as I see you – your vanity, your perpetual refusal whenever and wherever you were needed. To hear you injecting your poison into people who believe in anything . . . you who’ve never been capable of forming any true attachment for anyone, who’ve never made the slightest sacrifice for anything.’

He felt his chin beginning to tremble again, yet he could not turn his head, held by the fury in the woman’s eyes. Perhaps she was right. It was no use trying to explain to her that everything she said, even though it might all be true, that that wasn’t the point in any way. Also, it was now too late to offer her a chair, so he stood up himself. She must have long prepared this speech, rehearsing each insult untold times, and – how long ago already! – finding in them her consolation and her justification.

He interrupted her:

‘Why are you telling me all this? Why precisely now?’

‘Because I’m leaving. For ever.’

‘What are you going to do?’

‘I’m going away, with the children. I shall live with them. You have no objection?’

‘No, none.’

The woman, exhausted by her long and violent emotional spasm, now looked suddenly much older. There was little left to discuss, and it was soon done. Stetten agreed at once to all her demands. She would be no burden to the children; she was a wealthy woman.

'I shall leave the day after tomorrow,' she said. She couldn't keep a note of hesitancy from creeping into her voice, as though she even now expected him to persuade her not to go.

He said:

'It's all quite clear, and I won't hold you back. You will certainly be quite happy with the children. You belong with them. I've foreseen all this for some time now.'

'So you're right once more, aren't you?'

'Yes,' he answered, 'I'm right once again.'

'And you're happy about that. Admit it.'

'You and I have always had a very different conception of happiness. Indeed, that may be why we have always been strangers to one another . . . even during that time when we lay in one another's arms . . . that is to say, a long time ago.'

She still had a great deal to say and was still waiting for something that didn't happen. He gave up listening to her, and at last she went away. Twenty years too late. The period of the decline of the Roman Empire was longer than its times of growth and maturity combined. Decline takes altogether too long in the life of individuals as in history. Too much time is wasted in farewells while the proper moment for departure is missed. New epochs stink of decay, for the corpses have more inertia than the heirs have energy.

2

When Stetten left the house he felt that he might wander about the streets for the next two days; it was as though he must not go home before his wife had left. Everything had been said, the separation was now definite. A further meeting would be a mistake and utterly pointless.

He went in the direction from which the firing seemed to be coming. It was certainly a long way to go. However, he had plenty of time, two whole days, in fact. He came across military patrols; the faces of the soldiers beneath their steel helmets appeared more brutal even than usual. Whenever it was a question of destroying an old, civilised city and its inhabitants, the Vandals were brought in to do the

job. One could find them in one's own country, in villages where they still lived the same oafish life as their ancestors in the thirteenth century. There they waited until they were summoned to wreak their bestial fury in the sack of a great city. If need be they would have torn up the pilgrims' crosses from the ground and bashed in the people's heads with them; but they had been given weapons, weapons which the men of the city had invented. And they had steel helmets to cover their heads, those heads in which a world was echoed, more frightening even than the real world.

'Now then, sir; where do you think you're off to?'

It was a not unfriendly sentry.

'How comical you look, my friend,' said Stetten. 'In broad daylight you carry a gun and wear a steel helmet. I see you have a revolver as well. Of whom are you so frightened, then?'

The sentry examined him closely:

'If you go any farther you'll see soon enough that they're not throwing sugared almonds around today. You'd be wise, sir, to go home and stay there. At least, that's what I'd do if I could.'

'So you people are playing at civil war, right here in the centre of the town.'

'It isn't playing. A lot of people have found that out already. These are bad times. And there's nothing the likes of us can do about it.'

Stetten walked on. The young sentry called after him:

'Sir! Where are you going, sir?'

'To the civil war!' cried Stetten over his shoulder. And he waved his cane in the air.

Evening was beginning to fall. The light of the street lamps made the deserted alleys appear sadder than ever. Isolated shots rang out, but their effect was invisible. One might, indeed, have imagined that it was all play-acting. Stetten now began to recognise where he was again. He had once had a friend who lived in this part of the town. Naturally he, too, had later disappeared. His wife was quite right. There was no one left. As he set off for the civil war he twirled his stick in the air; that had been the fashion among men-about-town during the period when he was writing his book about the Civil War in Northern Italy, its causes and its futility. So he twirled his stick and tried to sing: *Je m'en vais en guerre civile, mironton, mironton, mirontaine . . .* It sounded wrong somehow, so he gave it up and resumed his dialogue with Dion. He had plenty of time for everything.

He had no idea how late it was, since they'd taken away his watch. He kept meaning to listen to the bell striking in the church tower, but each time he forgot, hearing only the last stroke. Or perhaps it was one o'clock; he didn't know. It certainly wasn't yet daylight outside, and it seemed unlikely that they'd interrogate him while it was still dark.

The room was too full. There were not enough bunks and most of the inmates were sleeping sitting up. Or perhaps they were only pretending to be asleep. They'd said all they had to say. They plainly had no desire to listen to the stories of the newcomers.

The dull aches in the back of his head and along his back had become more acute, but Stetten hardly noticed them. He was conscious of dried blood on his face, and his lips were certainly swollen. He had important conversations ahead of him. The truths which he had to impart to some gentlemen would, he feared, sound less effective coming from a smashed face and hideously puffy lips.

Someone nearby said:

'They won't give anyone any bloody peace till they've smashed up everything.'

Nobody answered.

'What I say is this,' the voice began again, 'I always said the same. If we hadn't been such damned fools in 'eighteen, that was our chance. The people's too bloody good. The people just want peace. And that's the trut'

'Yes, it's true enough,' another voice said, hesitantly. 'But it's too late now. Whenever anything happens the people are left alone, absolutely alone.'

Stetten laughed aloud. The man soon put him in his place:

'It's nothing to laugh at, comrade. There we were, in our workers' block. When it started we thought we'd have the whole quarter on our side. We thought in a couple of hours we'd have crossed over into the centre of the town and sorted everything out there. And then what happens? The electric light goes on and we see there's no strike. And then the ammo doesn't come. No guns. Nothing. The quarter hadn't risen. We'd been forgotten almost. We had wounded and we couldn't look after them. We were alone. And what I say is this: the people's always alone.'

'Oh, shut up! We've heard it all already. Let's get some sleep!'

Once again it all became quiet.

Someone must have bumped into him, for Stetten found himself

awake again. He heard the stertorous breathing of the sleepers, the snores and the mumbled fragments of words. Once one cried: 'Don't shoot! Don't shoot! It's...' The sentence broke off; perhaps even in the dream it was too late. In dreams, too, men can shoot faster than they can think.

'Are you pleased with me now, Dion? Am I in the right place at last? Poor chap, will I disappoint you when I tell you that I've learned absolutely nothing from this experience that I didn't already know? I'm just proved right once again, and that's all. It's not man's dignity that gets beaten up: I knew that before but I realised it even more clearly when I was being pummelled and kicked myself. What profit do you expect will come from making a man like Stetten suffer? I've always felt sorry for the underdog, but I'll never feel any solidarity with people who don't know in truth what they are suffering for, and, indeed, who scarcely have any idea of what they're doing. In that respect the victims are nearer to their persecutors, and have a closer resemblance to them than they have to me. Don't accuse me of underestimating your comrades in arms. I knew what they were like before ever I met them. During the thousands of years of their incursions into history, I've met them over and over again. They've not changed. They kill and they die for an iota, which to them is indistinguishable from an omikron. They've always done it, they still do. We, however, my dear Dion, have the duty of endowing such senseless behaviour with at least the appearance of sense, so as to make it intelligible. A sad vocation; only the faith of he who follows it can prevent it from being downright ridiculous. Only now, do you think, has your superannuated professor learned that he's not the only one who is left alone, that that happens on occasion to the people as well?'

From the guard who led him along the endless corridors Stetten learned that it was only half-past one. He wasn't left to wait in one of the unspeakably gloomy passages; these were interminable in length and there were so many of them that one might imagine the building put up in order to house them.

The official, who introduced himself as a *Hofrat*, greeted him in a friendly and almost respectful manner, offering him the only armchair.

'I have the report on your case here. It all seems to be a most regrettable misunderstanding – but I hardly need tell you that, professor. The security organisations are overworked; as a result they've been behaving with more energy than foresight. I'm sure you'll make allowances for this, professor. On the other hand, private persons, no matter how

respectable, cannot be allowed to mix themselves up in a police action. Unfortunately, you've let yourself become so involved, sir, as your report here shows.'

The official was fully conscious that he possessed charm. He had proved it over and over again, when highly-placed ladies or gentlemen, requiring special treatment, had to be protected from the rigours of the penal code or from blackmail. His subordinates dreaded his underhand harshness; while favoured clients of the police were granted a reassuring smile, whose purpose was to make them realise the kindness and understanding nature of the omniscient authority. On this occasion, however, he was himself overtired, and he found it more than usually difficult to detach his gaze from the finger-nails of his right hand. They said of him that when he did not dare bare his teeth he gazed at his nails.

Stetten said:

'I find the over-exhaustion of the security organisations all the more regrettable in view of the over-exertions that have brought it about. Yet even in their present pitiable state *your* organisations for *our* security ought to avoid the falsification of reports and the production of lies. Please realise, my dear *Hofrat*, that I have not, as you put it, allowed myself to become involved in a police action. The bestial treatment of a severely wounded man is not, according to our laws, normal action on the part of the police, even less an authorised one, and . . .'

'This is not a question of what you choose to call a severely wounded man, professor. He was a sniper, caught in the act, a rebel committing murder in cold blood.'

'No. He was fighting. He was captured during a military operation. As an unarmed prisoner and one who was, as I say, severely wounded, he was the victim of maltreatment by *your* subordinates. It was then that I became involved.'

The official managed to produce his smile again.

'Yes, that is exactly what I regret. That my subordinates should have laid their hands on you, that causes me remorse, my dear professor, really deep remorse. They must have thought you were one of his people, that is the only possible explanation. But allow me to ask you this: what exactly were you doing in a fighting zone, in a quarter of the town where you had doubtless previously never set foot? What did you want there? A gentleman of your sort and, if you'll excuse the impertinence, of your age?'

'Must I answer these questions?'

'No, no, I beg you. I only wanted to put it to you. . . .'

'I wish to know the names of the officials who were responsible for the maltreatment that you can't deny took place. I further wish to be informed concerning the subsequent treatment that the severely wounded man has since received.'

'As for your first request, you are at perfect liberty to file a formal complaint. We are at the moment extremely busy with considerably more important matters, but so be it! As for the rebel, he has already been condemned by a special tribunal; he may have already been hanged without even knowing that he had found a protector in the person of Baron von Stetten.'

The official stood up:

'You must excuse me, but we people have little time for lengthy conversations. If you so wish it, I can arrange for you to be accompanied to your home. It would be safer. Your enviably youthful and evergreen temperament is no less dangerous than the trustworthy fists of my men.'

It was easy to see the satisfaction that the man derived from his mention of fists. He looked smilingly at Stetten's bruised face. He was, therefore, perhaps all the more impressed when Stetten asked to be put in immediate telephonic communication with one of the most powerful members of the government.

From the manner with which Stetten spoke to the great man, the official guessed that their relationship might be such as, in certain circumstances, to give an unpleasant and weighty importance to Stetten's words. Almost with servility he offered Stetten a car to take him to the Chancellery; besides placing his own washing-room at his disposal, he offered him analgesic and nerve-calming drugs, such as are apparently always carried by strong men of that type.

The statesman was surrounded by those individuals known as *feschaks* — men who, after years of inactivity and thwarted ambition had reached an age when they were ripe for bold undertakings. In the war that their fathers had brought about they had gained swift promotion and unearned decorations; they had survived the collapses; they had put away their imperial cockades; yet they had kept their dress uniforms, for they hoped that though the emperor had lost his rights, they were yet men enough to regain their own privileges. Their love affairs and their quarrels, in which 'honour' always played a part, were public knowledge; they had spent their youth in accordance with the traditions of

their class. It now appeared, however, that with all this they had also created an army, an army prepared for civil war with ranks and other distinguishing marks, and with weapons, too. On this they intended to base their future.

The minister walked over to the door to greet Stetten, his arms apart, as though he meant to embrace him.

'My dear, dear professor, let me say how sorry I am to hear of your accident and how glad to see you again, particularly at this time. Please make yourself comfortable and tell me what I and my friend here can do for you.'

He introduced the other man in the room. It was he who was responsible for the 'cleaning up' that was at present going on: he was one of those grown-up *feschaks*. He wore the imperial uniform, with the highest of the imperial decorations.

Stetten looked at the officer with curiosity. He had difficulty in not uttering his opinion aloud: 'Energetic in the attack, cruel through thoughtlessness, courageous when in the limelight, a coward in defence.'

He said, turning to the minister:

'I'm an old man, my friend, and perhaps I am out of date. You have just shown me, in a manner that I find most comforting, that you remain a grateful pupil. You are receiving me at a most awkward time, and have doubtless put aside urgent matters of state on my behalf. So I shall be frank with you and try to waste as little of your time as I can. But is it not uncivil of me to retain your friend?'

The night was nearly passed, the first hours of daylight might bring important news, and meanwhile it was pleasant to be able to relax for a little in such good company. Thus spoke the officer. His voice had a not disagreeable ring to it and his gestures showed discreet courtesy.

So the conversation began, the outlines of which Stetten had prepared in the jail. He had thought to foresee every possible turn it might take, but he soon realised his error. In truth, the saviours of Austria praised their plan, but it was clear enough that the plan was not of their construction and that the men who were behind it were already secretly turning to other men who would carry it through to its conclusion. Also he realised that these saviours, while having foreseen the opening moves – which was not difficult, since it was they who had set the whole business in motion – had watched it rapidly grow too big for their limited capabilities. They had wanted a 'cleaning-up' action; the civil war into which this had developed had taken them by surprise.

They had drawn the sword; now, by some unpleasant magic, they were left holding only the scabbard.

'Let's leave the question of guilt, though it's not so irrelevant as you, unfortunately and incorrectly, assume that I should think. I didn't blast the stupid moralists in order that equally stupid machiavellians might strut about in their place. I taught your generation to recognise in law the dirty sources of power that established the law, but I also showed you that when power ignores its own laws it's headed for a smash. It's not just the workers of Vienna, Linz, Bruck that you're machine-gunning - it's the body of Austria; you're simply preparing the way for a power that observes no laws. You're ...'

The minister interrupted him:

'I love Austria, no one more than I, no, not even you, professor. It is in order to be able to save Austria from falling to that great foreign enemy that I must first get rid of the danger from the left, and at any price.'

'At any price? A dangerous phrase, a revelatory phrase. It is the great generous offer of the bankrupt, who knows that in any case he'll never pay. Your friend will, doubtless, recall learning at the Military Academy that a bad strategist always finds himself fighting on two fronts at once, even if he's had to drag the second one out of the ground; whereas the good strategist finds, if necessary invents, allies instead of enemies. He'll form a pact with death or the devil himself, so long as it's aimed against his principal enemy; then, when he's finished with his enemy, he can settle down to get rid of his allies. For a long time Austria has had bad luck with her lovers. *Bella gerant alii*; that applies to civil ones too, my friend.'

'This is no civil war, and on that I must insist, professor. In any case, we've offered an amnesty. The new day will bring an end to the uprising into which our misguided working class was inveigled by its leaders.'

'I have no idea what the new day will bring. Which is quite unimportant. Neither have you. Which is not unimportant. You, the leader who saved Austria by cleaning up Vienna with high explosive shells, you know as little about it as I do. And I must ask you not to address me as though I were part of a wireless audience; you can say anything into a microphone, for it is as little conducive to blushing as is a mirror. Your friend promised his pals on Sunday that, on the following day, he would be able to offer them positions in a newly-organised state. The next day, that was Monday, February 12. He is a strong man and, nowadays, strong men like to talk loud and long.'

'Yes, I agree, that speech was perhaps a little unfortunate,' put in the minister, with a sidelong glance at his friend. The latter said:

'No, it was simply a misunderstanding. You see, it wasn't meant to be published. Unless one deals with everything oneself in this country there's always a mix-up. I said so right away.'

The officer was showing signs of impatience. But he was called to the telephone. He gave his instructions. It was clear that things were not going as he had expected, and that in any case the coming day would not bring the capitulation of the workers. He explained the position briefly to his chief, and went out without saying goodbye to Stetten.

The conversation dragged on, Stetten refusing for far too long to recognise the futility of his effort. The 'saviours of Austria's freedom' were not themselves free to find a solution that might result in a reconciliation and a *status quo*. To finish, Stetten asked:

'The Church, then, approves of what's going on?'

'Yes – and that's all that really counts with me. That is why I have the strength to carry on.'

'Does the Church approve the maltreatment of severely wounded prisoners?'

'It approves of all action that leads to the re-establishment of the only German Catholic state on its holy foundations and that helps to insure it against all attack.'

'Does it also approve of the execution of a severely wounded prisoner? Can a priest give lessons to a clown who's become a Hitler?'

'You're tired and you've had a severe shock, professor. Needless to say the men who mishandled you will be punished. I'll see to that. Is there anything else I can do for you? Shall I order my car to drive you home?'

Stetten should have got up at this point. He was no more tired than he had been. Only a return to solitude offered a chance of overcoming the discouragement that had gained possession of him. He knew that had he had the tongues of angels, everything was against him and against reason – he was opposed by a father confessor. It was to him that he must talk. He saw himself, knocking on the door of the convent where the prelate lived; and he felt that such a meeting, in such circumstances, was symbolic and provided a fitting ending both to this night and to his life. 'No man can be deemed happy until he is dead' – the cliché is unbearably flat. Only in its ending can one see how bad a joke was a life devoted to truth and invincible pride.

'One's never too late for one's own defeat,' said Stetten, getting up with difficulty. 'It's true, but all the same I think I'll hurry a little

towards mine. There is one more discovery I wish to make: whether I am incapable of saving the life of one poor devil.'

'The night's nearly gone. Should you not go home to bed, professor?'

'No, thank you. I should like to see this green morn turn grey through a convent window. Who was it who wrote *Der grüne Morgen graute*? You don't know either? I suppose it must have been one of the younger poets. Do you know, my friend, I sometimes feel that I've wasted my life. I should have read more poetry, much more poetry. Perhaps if I had done so I should have been more humble by now. What do you think? Lend me your car and I'll go and ask your father confessor what sort of salvation my soul can still strive for.'

5

The prelate was fifty years old, though he looked younger. Actually, he was ageless, and had never been young. His memories of his childhood were brief and dry; he could not have said whether it was time that had withered them, nor did he ever ask himself that question. Life had held no surprises for him; it had led him, by easily foreseen stages, from a peasant's hut, overfilled with children, in Upper Austria, to his present position. The successes had arrived neither too soon nor too late; he had worked for them and earned them. The disappointment left behind by occasional failure had soon evaporated; for the frustrated anticipation that had preceded the failure had been neither acute nor particularly clear. The word 'becoming', which he used remarkably often and pronounced in a severe tone, typified the rules by which he governed his whole life and his self-education for that life.

He was well aware that he was considered an austere man. At one time this had flattered his vanity. Now it was plain to him that the others were wrong; they were merely trying to quieten their own bad consciences. The great cardinal, whom he had served for seventeen years, had once said to him: .

'You know nothing of repentance. What would Petrarch have been, had he never known love? Read Petrarch, my young friend, and if the opportunity should arise, commit a sin. Thus you will be able to share in the Christian's daily bread, to share in repentance.'

He read Petrarch and found him boring. He sinned – though this happened much later – he confessed, and he accepted penitence almost as though it were itself a sin, the feminine justification of sin. Perhaps he sinned so little because he derived so little pleasure from repentance.

He was the only man not to become a devoted follower of the cardinal. The others who worked for that great gentleman, came to notice the narrow limitations of the prelate's character. They called him *il agricola*, and the nickname stuck. On occasions he himself suspected that it was his weakness which protected him from falling under the ascendancy of the cardinal's strength; at first this suspicion worried him, but he soon became used to it. Gradually he grew aware of a most consoling certainty, brilliance did not move him because brilliance has no warmth, no substance, because it is only glitter.

During the ten years when the great codification of canonical law was going forward, the cardinal valued Agricola because of his industriousness; later, during the period of 'high politics', because of his reliability and his discretion. And perhaps there was also another reason; of all the unofficial ambassadors and messengers, he was the one who habitually spent the least money on his missions. Later still, when the struggle in Italy itself had grown increasingly acute while the factions that supported the cardinal were becoming weaker and less reliable, he realised that this all too useful peasant had the sharpest of eyes. Though he now never mixed with the people, he knew what they were thinking. After all, he was one of them himself.

The prelate saw early on the signs of the coming defeat. He concealed them from the cardinal. Yet he didn't betray him, though the temptation was great and the rewards that he would have received for so doing were made quite apparent.

When it was all over, the cardinal asked him how long he had known that the 'change-over' was in preparation and that Germanicus – as he ironically called his successor – had already a finger in every pie. The prelate answered: 'For over a year.' It was the truth. Yet he would not reply when asked why he had said nothing. Nor would he answer when asked why he, who had kept his knowledge from the one, had not sought to save his own position by participating in the intrigues of the other. All had happened as expected. The hope of a bishopric was gone, yet the loss caused him no particular anguish. The cardinal buried himself in his library. He had one consolation: provided he lived long enough, he would see his successor, after having rendered unto the new Cæsars far more than was their due, yet come into conflict with them. That feeble generation was tending towards the Right, and in the Roman salons the cardinal who had just lost was, ironically, known as the Bolshevik.

The prelate returned to his home in Austria. It was equivalent to exile. He wished to dedicate himself anew and exclusively to that study

of canon law which he had pursued until the time when the cardinal was summoned to high office. After some years his position began to change, at first barely noticeably, though perceptibly enough to himself; he was quite sure that instructions had been given that he was gradually to be withdrawn from the shadow into ever brighter lights. He knew that he was being tested, and he found no difficulty in passing the tests. It was not for him to decide whether the policy of his old cardinal, or the almost diametrically opposed one of his successor, was the right one. No doubt that arose in his breast was allowed to become sufficiently strong to make him an opponent of the official points of view: such views came from on high, from him who was responsible for their formulation, and therefore they must be correct.

And so his influence grew, to the uninitiated almost invisibly. Those who realised what was going on were most deeply impressed by the austerity of his being and the simplicity of his way of life. His hidden enemies searched in vain for his weakness; the past now meant nothing to those who knew most about it and who had the power to make him pay for his former allegiances. The dry frigidity of his faith might be disappointing, but behind it they suspected that there lay a secret, passionate faith as strong as the austerity which protected it.

No one realised that all his life this priest had remained sheltered from all great temptations, among others from the temptation of a faith which, being too stormy, demands proofs of vocation as it might demand a miracle. Neither their lives nor their sufferings had ever made men into saints: it was only their canonisation by the Church that could do that. Only thus could the prelate think of them, only in this light – and that not too frequently or deeply – could he contemplate their lives. Sexual desire was to him like physical suffering, recurring unexpectedly, to be gone through like pain or illness. Though hard to bear the suggestiveness of dreams was never dangerous.

The prelate had never loved anyone nor accepted the love of another. The law of his life was this: out of weakness, strength: out of grinding poverty, the sad richness of one who has never accepted anything from anybody.

'Please excuse the unusual hour of my visit,' said Stetten, even before he had crossed the threshold.

'A visit from you would be unusual, no matter what the hour. Furthermore, I was told you were coming. Coffee is waiting and an

armchair. You have had a hard day and a hard night, if I have not been misinformed.'

This reception was a far more friendly one than he had expected. While breakfasting, they would be able to feel their way around one another, in the manner of men who meet for the first time though they have long known about each other.

'Since you were told I was coming, you were doubtless also told why. I hope that we can avoid wasting time in superficial preliminaries: I mean that you won't tell me that it's not in your power to make a decision concerning the life of a man whom I have come to beg you to save.'

'I have no power, as you know, professor. However, I would support your efforts, I would add my influence to your own, if you can persuade me that the life of this individual, rightly condemned, is so much more valuable than that of the hundreds who, by God's sad will, are dying daily in our unhappy land.'

His tone of voice gave no indication of whether or not the prelate was ready to allow himself to be persuaded. So Stetten began, almost too loudly, almost too forcibly, to explain why the condemnation of this severely wounded man must appear a disgrace to anyone who loved Austria, and how shockingly painful a spectacle it was to see a man carried to the gallows on a stretcher, to see a dying man being hanged. If the State wished to demonstrate its power, it had chosen a very bad way to do so. If it wished to punish according to the law, then wasn't being severely wounded sufficient punishment if death were to be the result of wounds? Or alternatively if the man should recover, would there not still be time to bring him to justice before a normal court? Stetten quoted parallels from history. A régime may kill thousands without destroying the calm of those who survive: yet on occasion the death of one individual can move all his contemporaries to horror and can cause posterity to shudder, for the death of that one individual can assume a profound symbolical significance. Furthermore, it is only that act of symbolic injustice that is capable of so moving each man so as to make him feel as though he were himself the victim. This was such an occasion: the evil action must be prevented.

As the prelate did not answer at once Stetten went on. After each sentence he waited to give the other man time to speak; so he piled sentence on sentence, until at last the prelate's silence became intolerable to him and he too stopped talking. Finally the priest said:

'If you hadn't happened to be there when this person was arrested, would his fate have been so important to you? Your scepticism is well

known, professor. In your arrogance you have contested the validity of all parties, placing yourself above them. So may I ask what it was that led you to a place where you had to witness an event that would otherwise have meant nothing to you?

'Has your question any bearing on the matter? And is my scepticism any reason for agreeing to an act of criminal stupidity? Are my motives contemptible because they derive from an immediate experience, an experience that appears to be in disharmony with a life whose neutrality is the cause, as it is the result, of scientific impartiality?'

'Let us stick to my question, if you don't mind,' the prelate interrupted. 'What took you to the fighting zone?'

'Curiosity.... That seems to me as good an answer as any.'

'It's good enough, because it happens to be the true one, even though you would doubtless like to deny that truth as soon as you have uttered it. Let us call it . . . scientific curiosity. It sounds better.'

'As you will. What follows from that?'

'That this man is a stranger to you, far more strange than I am to you, far more strange than he is to me who have never seen him. The pity that you think you feel on his behalf has nothing to do with him; it has only to do with yourself, and — *sit venia verbo*, that you so deeply abhor — with your own evil conscience. This man, professor, be he hanged or not, he is your sacrifice — he and all his companions. Need I make myself more explicit to a clever man like you?'

'Yes, for you over-estimate me in more than one respect.'

'In one respect, perhaps, I do — the unfortunate business was started long before you could bring any influence to bear, and in our own disastrous age you were not the only one to help bring it to its present fruition. Recently I read a quotation from some Frenchman of a hundred and fifty years ago. It ran something like this: "A new idea is born in Europe: the idea of happiness!" I don't know how many murders the inventor of this new idea had on his conscience: he died on a scaffold, still young, but far too late. It began with the transformation of convents into clubs, places where death sentences were drawn up on behalf of this newly-born idea. The path it has followed is paved with millions of corpses.'

'Forgive me, sir, but you are ill-informed, or perhaps I should say ill-read. The more than thirty volumes, in which I put down what I had to say, constitute a single appeal against all ideals on whose behalf men have ever been called upon to die or to kill. I have . . .'

'Excuse me please, professor. I'll interrupt you since you interrupted me. It is true that I have never had the time to study more than

one-tenth of your works – you will understand, I am sure, that other things were and still are of far greater interest to me – yet I think I am not ill-informed when I say this: of all the deniers of God and the enemies of the Church, you have always been the most furiously engaged in the diabolical work of disintegration, you have been the loudest in your proclamations of man's rights against God, of this world against the next. You have taken part in the most monstrous fraud, in an attempt to make men believe that happiness is attainable here on earth. It is truly extraordinary to hear a man who, for years, has trampled on everything that is holy and good, now presuming to save the life of a condemned criminal in the very names of holiness and goodness. It is extraordinary, but not really very surprising. He who has destroyed the measuring-rod can measure no more; he who follows the signpost that points to hell, will lose his way by broad daylight in his father's house.'

That last sentence came from a lenten sermon of the cardinal's. The prelate was astounded that these words, heard more than twenty years before, should have remained fresh in his memory, ready to appear at this particular moment and accompanied by a typical gesture of the cardinal's. This odd fact deprived him for a moment of self-assurance.

Stetten said:

'I could easily argue with you. But time presses on and a decision must be reached before it is too late: is the poor devil to live?'

'For men like you time may be pressing, but not for us. The death that threatens him is only the close of an unworthy incident, for eternal life and eternal damnation only begin after death. Everything is being done to ensure him the consolations of religion. That is all that matters.'

'For you, perhaps, but not for him nor for his people. And not for me. Furthermore I doubt, monsignor, if it would be a matter of indifference to yourself, who are assured of the consolations of the Church at any time, if you had to decide whether to die now or twenty years hence.'

'That argument, professor, is as unworthy of your intelligence as it is of your tact. You and your like spend your lives in a fraud: you try to conceal, behind the pride you take in your allegedly all-encompassing existence on earth, the terror you feel before death and nothingness. So you are forced to behave all the time as though you were at the level of your intentions. What does my fear of death mean other than that I am a pusillanimous creature? However, I have a God: your god is nothing but pusillanimous humanity. God understands the imperfections of His creatures; He, the only perfect being, wished them to be as they are. You, on the other hand, must pretend perfection – what a

miserable farce! One little twist of destiny, and the game's up, the perfection becomes a stinking meal for worms. That's your god.'

'I have no god. Theologians always talk as though even atheists worshipped something, a false god, for instance, an idol. You have no idea how old, soiled, limited all that sort of talk is, though effective perhaps for the converts whom fear drives into your arms. Be that as it may, I didn't come here to ask you for salvation, but for something which in your eyes is of far less importance – for the life of one, Franz Unterberger.'

'Of that I am well aware. I judge the request by the man who makes it. I must state that in this case I regard it as most unbecoming for you to mix yourself up in the business. You are disqualified for such a rôle by everything that you have taught. You speak in the name of nobody, you belong to nothing. For all I know the communist, misled by people like you, who believes in eternal felicity in a classless society, may be nearer the truth than you are. You doubt everything; perched on the dung heap of rapidly decomposing scientific knowledge, you crow: "Everything that cannot be understood by the human brain is condemned, is non-existent. Let us be proud as was Satan before the fall; let us destroy the illusions of God, country, ideals, so that man, the individual, may be everything to himself." That is what you taught the young people who came to you, hungry for knowledge: right and morality became in your mouth prejudices of filthy origin which, as such, you spat out. And now you come here and demand, in the name of right and morality, that a Christian State be untrue to itself in order to suit your wishes. Admit that you are now yourself sacrificing to that power you habitually deny. It was not the idol, reason, that brought you here: it was the faint memory of your Christian upbringing, but it is still too weak, that memory, far too weak. You haven't yet learned humility. You intended to ask, which would have been becoming. Instead you have demanded, and that is most unbecoming. I refuse your demand.'

So all the effort was vain. There was no sense in continuing the discussion. The prelate had passed a good night, and besides he had the definite sense of security of one who has secret links with power. Stetten knew well that wounded vanity would be the only cause for answering him. And only by making a supreme effort could he prevent the other man from noticing how much his chin was trembling. So he began calmly, choosing his words with care; but soon he let himself be carried away until he felt that his sentences were blows directed against that hard, coarse, peasant profile opposite him.

'It may be among the duties of a man in your position to teach other men humility. Certainly you have never had any inclination to learn it for yourself. My job was to teach the inter-relationships of human history, and to show men's grandeur or worthlessness against the background of history. I had to learn before I could teach. What I tried to explain to my pupils I had first to explain to myself. I set out to examine the greatness of mankind, of its gods, its countries and its ideals; unlike Saul, I found no kingdom, but only asses. I found, to be as brief as possible, that men have never been so thoroughly deceived as when they believed that they were performing actions according to a plan, as when they thought that they were forcing a passage to a new world, whether it was a heavenly or an earthly one. And when I came to examine the great swindlers, the saviours, the prophets, the statesmen, the victorious generals, I found that they had been themselves victims of their own swindles. "I see everything that is under the sun. I see that it is all a grasping for the wind." One of your people said something like that on one occasion. I have proved that men who step into history as conquerors can only, by dying, avoid seeing their victories changed into defeats. I have put the most simple truths into an exact form: that Achilles was no hero, since he had only his heel to protect. I have discovered an unexpectedly vast field to which this simple truth is applicable. And, to continue speaking in parables, I pointed out that the arrival on earth of the Lamb of God had, as immediate consequence, the massacre in and about Bethlehem, its birth-place, of all boys of two or under: it is all truthfully written down in the Gospel according to St Matthew, Chapter II, verse 16. I believe a thousand oxen not too high a price to pay for a truth. A salvation which offers a kingdom-in-heaven-after-death, and which, for this obscure purpose, drives men to death for century after century, there I find the price altogether too high - particularly since man must pay it with the only sure thing of value he possesses, namely his life, I've tried to convince my pupils that the continuation of unhappiness, as well as the existence of the Moloch-rations, Moloch-countries and Moloch-ideals, is based on human forgetfulness. I've preached good memory as a religion: the religion of true historical consciousness by which the past, though it may appear obscure in detail, will yet in its general course be perfectly clear. If I have admitted that the economist Karl Marx understood more about the nature of history than all university faculties combined have ever dared to guess, I have also shown his too obedient followers that he only cleared the ground in order to erect a new temple of idolatry in place of the old one. I've

tried to persuade a section of our youth not to follow that rear echelon – soldier, that heroic hospital orderly, Friedrich Nietzsche. If morality is gall, then power must be made as loathsome as leprosy, and the will to power recognised as what it is, namely, as the prelude to the balderdash of Nietzsche's *Ecce Homo!* Wise men have taught youth – in vain, as it happens – to give correct answers. I, being more modest, tried only to teach them to ask questions, and, having done so, to regard each answer as the premise on which to base a fresh question. Such was the total of my ambitions as a teacher. I told them that they must recognise a grain of knowledge to be more valuable than a ton of opinion or a world of belief. I said this to them; no ideal is of sufficient value to be worth the sacrifice, on its behalf, of the scent of a single flower, of one among a child's innumerable smiles, of the smallest sip of wine, of the least important kiss. For this, I have said to them, is the truth; man is unique and his one life is unique. *Hic et nunc salta!* There is nowhere else, and later will be too late. I . . .'

'I, I, I . . .' the prelate broke in roughly. 'The word has become flesh in the form of I, Baron von Stetten, god and high priest of truth, I, I! How many I's has the Church outlived, the Church that remains for ever young while the I's are scattered in time like the chaff before the wind! You speak against belief; yet you demand credence for your worn-out heresies that you call new. You talk of belief the way a blind man might discuss colours; you talk of grace, you, a poor wretch whom grace has never touched. Your reality is deceit. The only reality is the realm of God; eternal life is all that really exists. You, a realist! You are merely the bastard offspring of a rotten eighteenth century, the last feeble death-rattle of a megalomaniac nineteenth. Can't you see that you're all bankrupt, more totally defeated than even the Manichæans or the Catharans *e tutti quanti*? There are no victories, you say? The Church is victorious, each hour that strikes is for her the hour of victory, and that is something that as an historian you should surely realise. You and your ilk, you're defeated, smitten hip and thigh, so that even the world you once deceived is turning away from you. It is still searching for a new road, but it will at last find the way to salvation. That is what is happening now: it is in the course of this process that your Unterberger is being condemned; and as for you, you are damned, damned to survive your own downfall, though you are clever enough not to die with your victims.'

The prelate had sprung to his feet and pronounced the last sentence standing, his clenched fist held opposite Stetten's face. He became calm again, sat down, and said:

'Over and over again men and parties have arisen, deceivers and deceived, and have wished to change the world in the name of freedom, happiness, justice, yes, even in the name of the Holy Scriptures. When they have been conquered it has always been plain that they had done nothing save increase the sum of misery in the world. How could it be otherwise? And you, Professor Stetten, you know that only too well. There is no palliative for human suffering save only in salvation. And it is offered to you toδ. The Saviour died for you too.'

Stetten stood up now. He had nothing left to say. Yet he was reluctant to depart leaving the last word to the other man.

'We shall never understand one another. Who would have expected that we could? I came here, very-tired and in 'bad physical condition, to ask for your interest on behalf of a poor man, to beg you to help him. In vain! You are right, I am beaten. But you are wrong when you say that you are the victor. I could easily prove to you that the victories of the Church are no different from other triumphs. You need only to recall the metamorphoses through which the Church has passed in order correctly to evaluate its past victories. And you yourself, sir, who are now so zealously engaged in attempting to bury the old cardinal's policies beneath the excessive energy which you apply to his successor's cause – you yourself, still testing yourself, still engaged in exercises more suited to a fresh convert than to a well-established priest – you yourself, are you not defeated? You are building a Catholic State here? Ask your old cardinal; he'll tell you that what is now being done will turn Catholic Austria against the Church for years to come, if not for ever. Yet you know that the struggle for the souls of the workers, the struggle that your cardinal intended, is the most important task of the Church today. You are a traitor in that struggle, and a traitor to your past too, because you are 'not free. As for me, I have never preached old heresies dressed up as new, I have tried to give men courage, courage to be free, free from beliefs, free from illusions, free from all restraints save those of life itself.'

'Death does not frighten me, today less than ever before. In preparing myself against it I don't think of Him who must have been so terribly frightened that he had to cry: "My God, why hast Thou forsaken me!" I think of another man, in peace of mind, draining his goblet of hemlock, and not begging that that cup be taken from him. I think of Socrates, whom stupidity might kill but could never conquer. For no matter how strong and powerful and frightful stupidity may be, it can have no future, for it has no past. Stupidity is born anew

with each generation. It is as absolute as only the Church still pretends to be. But the work of those who think is entailed, the secret conspiracy of the intellect advances; perhaps it will never reach its goal, but at least it will never end so long as there is one single man who asks: "Why do I suffer?" and one other who can remember the answer to the question, "The root of all that is human, including human suffering, is man. The source of truth, the highest thing that exists, is man, man himself and only man."

'A weak exit, professor, very weak. Perhaps the gallery might applaud, if there were a gallery here and if its inmates could understand your works. Just so as to show you in the simplest way the weakness of your exit, I will now tell you this: the rebel Unterberger was hanged two hours after the pronouncement of the verdict. You have been fighting for the life of one who was already dead. In that fact recognise the symbol of your failure, the failure of your life and of all your actions.'

CHAPTER IV

I

It was daylight now. Stetten had not seen the 'green morn' turn to grey. Exhausted, he wandered along the streets half covered in snow towards the nearest station on the suburban railroad, a good hour's walk. It was seventeen hours by now since, *mironton, mironton, miron-taine*, he had set off for the civil wars. Even had he been in the mood to do so, he could not now twirl his cane in the air, for the police had broken it across his back. He had saved the silver knob and now held it clutched in the pocket of his overcoat, as though it still gave him some support. He stopped himself thinking about the prelate and the conversation they had had together. He had talked too much, and in retrospect his words seemed feeble. Not one of them had touched the essence of the matter; they had merely served the other man as cues for the humiliation of the supplicant.

Had he forgotten how to talk to others? Or was it that he had never been able to do so? In any case, Stetten thought, it was too late now to worry about that. If he was, in fact, a bastard offspring of a rotten eighteenth century, or the last feeble death-rattle of a megalomaniac nineteenth, at least he had nothing to do with the twentieth, at any rate so far as its manifestations up to date were concerned. What use

propinquity in space if there were such remoteness in time? The dead might pass eternity congratulating themselves on their immortality, if their non-existence did not effectively stop them from so doing. I am the forerunner of the twenty-first century, monsignor, which is why we cannot hope to understand one another.' Yet the prelate had understood very well; he was vaccinated against the infection of rhetoric; he had studied in that school himself.

Stetten had no followers, it was true. But it had always also been true of those men who believed themselves to be the leaders of armies, crowds, masses.

*Why should we faint, and fear to live alone
Since all alone, so Heaven has will'd, we die?*

Poor consolation. Stetten had once, ironically, used this verse against the Puritans. It was open to question whether or not Heaven had will'd it so, but there could be no doubt that man was alone, dying in a fearful solitude, and that that was life.

Scarcely ten hours ago Stetten had quoted those two lines to Grunder, the labour leader. The latter had said:

'Partly obvious and partly false. Still, at this moment it sounds pretty good to me.'

They were standing in a dark corridor, near the open door of one of the big front rooms. At the windows were men of the *Schutzbund*, and from time to time they fired a burst from their machine-guns. The young woman who had brought him here had disappeared. He would have liked to thank her once more; she had saved his life, dragging him at a lucky moment from the dangerous street into the entrance hall of a building, and infusing some of her courage into him. She was a brave woman. Now she had gone and he didn't even know her name. He still had in his pocket the frozen apple she had given him.

'Man doesn't live alone. How he actually dies is as unimportant as everything else that's not connected with his life.'

'No, it's not unimportant how life, which is all that counts, ends. The reasons for which a man dies are not unimportant,' said Stetten, pointing at a young man who lay at their feet, his mouth wide open. He was dead.

'That young comrade knew what he was fighting for, and that's enough. The chance bullet that killed him in a split second means nothing. Whatever else death may be it's no argument - either for or against.'

"You're talking like a man who has given up hope.'

'I'm talking like a man who is responsible for other men dying and killing.'

'You were an officer during the war. Now the responsibility is yours alone. Don't you find it too heavy?'

'My dear professor, you lack the experience of action. One considers beforehand, one seeks motives or justification afterwards, but while it's going on, when one must act and command, one is only capable of as much perception as the momentary situation demands. One time at which one cannot worry about the future is the moment when one attempts to assure that future by means of a single, powerful act. Don't you see that?'

'I do indeed, but I don't believe it. You aren't capable of such deliberate self-limitation. A great general has a limited field of vision throughout his life, and not just at the moment of crisis. You are not such a man.'

'Then I'm not a good general.'

'No, you're not. And you've already lost this battle, as you know.'

'Lost battles also serve a purpose. There is no such thing as pointless fighting; the only pointless defeats are those that are accepted without a blow being struck. If a movement surrenders without struggling, it automatically dissolves itself. And by its suicide it gives its conquerors inalienable strength. The Austrian workers' movement can never disappear the way the German one has done, even if we lose this battle, and we haven't lost it yet.'

Stetten had remained for a long time in that house and near that man.

Now, after the conversation with the prelate, he found some consolation in recalling those hours. Now for the first time he was sure that his place was beside Grunder, who was perhaps dead by now, and with those men whom he had watched dying.

Grunder was a clever man who therefore understood more than he knew. And he knew a great deal. He had hesitated for years before joining battle: the conditions had long been ripe. The best opportunities were passed, as he was well aware. He was not the sort of man to find consolation in the grandeur of the tragedy. He was a Jew, and Stetten had never before been so conscious of that fact as now, seeing him there among his comrades-in-arms. The black beard that framed his otherwise clean-shaven face stressed the prominence of his features, the features of the old race. His eyes seemed ageless. Thus might his ancestor Abraham have contemplated the world which seemed to be awaiting his test. 'Our faith shall be proved, my son shall die, but never, Lord, will we forgive you our faithfulness and his death.' The

Jews had always broken off the tragedy in the fifth act, for they had never accepted death. Even to the story of Job, whom they discovered in their exile, they gave a happy ending. Wherever there were rebels, there, too, were the Jews, driven by their belief that they could bring about a happy ending on earth.

Grunder's men were, inevitably, prisoners of the hour. This was why they gave such curt answers to Stetten's questions about why they were fighting, with what object and with what hope of success. They seemed to resemble one another closely, as though they had abandoned their individual pasts, as though their lives had only started three days before, at the moment when they reached for their weapons. They discussed the news among themselves, rumours from the city or the larger world; the good ones encouraged them in their strength and determination, the bad ones they minimised and soon forgot. They spoke of their enemies with hatred. The presence of the comrade doctor, as they called Grunder, filled them with pride. The enemy seemed to them utterly damned when they heard the announcement, over his radio, that Grunder had run away like a coward.

They had no idea of the gulf that separated them from Grunder. He might share their dangers and their exhaustion, but in spirit he was far away from this moment that dominated them, forced farther and farther back into the loneliness of his thoughts. For he was already living in the future, looking for motives and justification. And he recognised that the justification would only have validity if he had the courage to see and admit that he and his friends had made a series of appalling blunders in the years since the revolution.

'You haven't asked me what I'm doing here,' Stetten said.

'No,' answers Grunder, 'I haven't asked. You're here because you want to see for yourself that uprisings always follow the exact pattern that you laid down in your writings.'

'That's the second time today someone's accused me of always wanting to be right,' Stetten replied with a smile that concealed the pain he felt.

'I'm sorry. I didn't mean quite that. I meant to say that it was an historian's justifiable curiosity that brought you here.'

'If you'll forgive me being personal, my dear Grunder, my wife told me a few hours ago that she was leaving me once and for all. I have no wish to go home until my home is really empty. So you see what I came here to find was a comfortable temporary retreat.'

They both smiled, as though he had made a joke which did not quite warrant a laugh.

After a while Stetten said:

'Perhaps I could be of some use? Arranging an armistice perhaps, or terms of agreement with the government?'

'No agreement is possible. There's been too much bloodshed.'

'Didn't you say a little while ago that death is no argument - either for or against?'

'That's true. But murder is an argument.'

'Still, your people haven't been firing sugared almonds either. Or so somebody told me this afternoon.'

Grunder interrupted him with a wave of his hand:

'Listen. These are our conditions: Parliament must be summoned at once; the government must resign; the civil war army must be demobilised; a parliamentary commission must be set up to enquire into the crimes committed by the present government. Well, professor, do you still think an agreement possible?'

'Earlier on, my friend, you could have had all that. You've made too many mistakes, and you know it. It's too late now. This government is doing its duty if it protects this country from the Nazis and thus saves the Austrian working class from the fate of the German one. Democracy is finished - at least for the time being - but Austria is not yet lost.'

'You're wrong. If we're beaten it's all over.'

'It's just for that reason that you mustn't let yourselves be beaten. You must come to an arrangement with the government.'

'Even if it was possible, even if we wanted to do so, this government would not be capable of making any such arrangement. They dare not even try, because they're acting under foreign orders.'

'If that were true . . . '

'Your personal acquaintanceships should make it easy enough for you to check the truth. In a few years' time it'll be quite easy to see the game that's being played here. It's nothing more or less than the preparations for a new world war. It may be that we'll be defeated today, here. The working class will come out of the next war on top.'

'I doubt that last statement. We'll have a new war because you weren't capable of fighting the last one properly. You're altogether too incompetent. The Jews among you love to prophesy . . . a racial failing. Prophets have always been proved right when they announce the imminence of horror and destruction. Their more agreeable predictions have never come true. They know a lot about hell-on-earth . . . about heaven-on-earth nothing. You want to be careful.'

The young man detailed to lead Stetten out of the fighting zone was a courier. Stetten asked him:

'Do you believe you'll win?'

'No,' the young man replied. 'We've lost already. An uprising must always be on the offensive, as Lenin said. We've been on the defensive ever since the beginning.'

'Why?'

The man looked at Stetten hesitantly and at last said:

'Our organisers are good at organising a legal party. They may be good parliamentarians. They're no revolutionaries. They're frightened of power, even when it's offered to them. That's why they're frightened of revolution. With them as leaders we've lost the February one. The October one we'll win on our own.'

'Are you a communist?'

'No, not yet, but I'll become one after this. The entire working class will go communist.'

'The working class, young man, is at present back at its benches in the factories. There's no strike. It's not the Grundlers who've refused to act, it's the working class as such.'

'And why? Because of the everlasting withdrawals, the eternal surrenders. The working class has lost its faith in itself and in its leaders. That, my good sir, and that alone is the reason. Just wait till October! Then we'll present the bill . . . and it'll be made out in Russian!'

2

The road was difficult walking, and Stetten went slowly. On a little hillock stood a bench, covered in snow. Stetten sat on it. Like all homeless people, he had plenty of time.

'A world of believers, my dear Dion. You and the prelate are both believers, and so is the little statesman, and the boy who thinks that Austria will be talking Russian in eight months. Here you all are, conjugating the future, and I'm the only heretic. My kingdom is a snow-covered bench. Is not this the time to die, Dion? Would you reproach me once again with cowardice, with having run away before even taking up a position? Can't you see that there is no position worth taking up? The priest could show your teacher that no one stood behind him. Carve on my tombstone: "Beside me lies the corpse of Austria."'

'What did you say, sir?'

Stetten looked up at an elderly man who stood in the road. He got up and went towards him.

‘Nothing . . . nothing at all. . . .

‘I see, I see. You were talking to yourself. At home, ever since the death of my lady wife, God bless her, it’s been the same with me. We’re not beasts of the field, are we? They can’t expect us never to say anything. A human voice is a human voice, even if it is your own. That’s what I say. You’re not from these parts, are you?’

‘No.’

‘I thought as much. You’re from the city, aren’t you? Well, you’ve certainly got a fine to-do over there just now. They’re busy shooting each other, at least that’s what I’ve heard say. They’re going too far this time. First we have a revolution. That’s hardly finished, and now they want to start another one. If they were in my position, having to walk to the convent every day just for a cup of something warm, then they’d have something to think about. Let them kill each other for all I care, but why can’t they leave us in peace, eh? In peace, I say. And as for you, you shouldn’t be sitting on a damp bench like that, it won’t do you any good. Yes, yes, I can see you’ve got an overcoat on, and a proper one too, not like mine. I expect you’ve got a decent pension. All the same, snow’s snow, and it stays damp, and no revolution’s going to change that. That’s what I always say. Am I right?’

The railway station was nearer than Stetten thought. Once it came in sight he began to hurry. The stationmaster told him that the train schedule was interrupted until further notice. He added that his job was such a nervous strain that it was bound to lead to stomach ulcers if not actually to gallstones; that the bosses treated a stationmaster in a small station like this as though he were nobody, even though he was responsible for five locals a day; and in view of all this, he wasn’t really surprised that the world had gone topsy-turvy and that the most reliable thing in the world, the train schedule, had been suspended.

Stetten was so tired that he failed to realise how his chin was trembling in a continual, ridiculous manner; nor that the stationmaster took this to be a sign of approbation and encouragement to continue his chatter in detail. When at last he found himself alone again, on the main road that led to the tram terminus, Stetten thought how much he resembled one of those episodic characters in some strange drama, walking on in each scene so as to provide the cues for the various principles, heroes, lovers, rustics, townies and what not, to express their opinions. He himself had no part in the action, his only rôle being

to ask the way or the time of the next train. And he always received replies of the highest importance, which yet meant nothing to him. He couldn't decide which piece of information was the more vital, that the Saviour had died for him too? or that the revolution would not change the dampness of the snow?

He found people altogether too difficult, particularly people of the fourth decade of the twentieth century. They were richer in absolute certainties than they were in bread with which to feed their children.

There was a tram waiting at the terminus. He could be home in half an hour. He thought a while and then got out of the tram. He would be a day too early. Murderous as the civil war might be, he could only kill one day with it. What was he to do with the other?

Luckily at that moment he remembered that the Rubins had often invited him to visit them. They had recently moved and their new apartment must be somewhere in this neighbourhood. He went into a telephone booth, where he found their number and address in the book. He thought at first of phoning them to say he was coming, but he was afraid lest they tell him not to do so. He felt he couldn't bear another rebuff. Once he was inside their apartment they would surely let him stay.

He prepared his opening remarks carefully. The young woman and her husband had often come to see him during the past few years. It was they who had told him what had happened to Faber, and they had kept him informed about the subsequent developments. Now it was his turn. As he came in he would say:

'Good news, my dear young lady! Guess what it is!'

And after that they would surely let him stay.

Relly opened the door to him herself, and asked at once, in a horrified tone of voice:

'Good God! What's happened to you?'

Stetten didn't manage to say the carefully-prepared sentence, for Relly quickly dragged him into her apartment and led him by the hand, as though he were blind, into the big drawing room. Even on such a dark day as this it still gave an impression of light. She sat him down in a deep armchair.

'If you stay silent another moment, I'll fall asleep; if you go on looking at me as pitifully as that, I'll burst into tears,' said Stetten. He realised for the first time that his shoes were as heavy as lead.

'Who dared to treat you like that, professor?'

'There wasn't much question of daring. Early this morning they hanged a severely wounded man. If they can do that, they can do

anything. All the same, I have good news for you and your husband. Where is he, by the way?"

"I don't know. He couldn't bear it any longer, and I couldn't stop him. He's gone to join the *Schutzbund*. What is your good news?"

Stetten told her. He would have liked to add how everything had been arranged so that Faber could leave Germany at once for Prague, where he would be properly looked after, which the poor fellow would certainly need. The young woman seemed extraordinarily troubled, and she asked no further questions.

He said, hesitantly:

"May I stay here for the time being? For a few hours at any rate?"

"You must stay here. You must have a wash and some food, and then go to sleep. My God, you look awful!"

She went to get everything ready for him. Stetten sat down on the couch and undid his shoelaces. Now he could let himself feel tired.

When Relly came back she found him asleep. She took off his shoes and covered him with a rug. He was so small, so pathetic, like a beaten child.

3

If the news of Doino's being freed had come a few days earlier, it would have made Relly happy. Now it neither made the world seem a freer place, nor was it even a particular relief. Certainly it was good news, wonderful news, but the anxiety she felt for Edi was too great to let her appreciate this other thing.

Since the moment when she had seen him disappear round the corner of the street - he hadn't turned, although he must have realised that she would be watching him from the drawing room window - she had stayed there, waiting. If waiting is a form of suffering, then it is particularly cruel for it does not stimulate, it has no crises, it makes the person who waits unspeakably tired and yet it prevents sleep; if waiting is action, it prohibits all other actions, making them meaningless before they are completed so that the hand almost lets the cup drop before it has reached the lips. Only he who has become fully reconciled to solitude, he who can hear his own heart-beats in daylight and who has learned not to listen to them, only he knows how to wait. Relly hated herself when she was alone, and she felt as though this sentiment of her own futility would overpower her for ever. Edi provided a barrier between herself and this sense of her own uselessness. And Edi would never come back. Each shot fired out there was aimed at him.

Was it cowardice on her part that made her be so overwhelmed by this illusion of simultaneity? Did everyone perhaps suffer from such painful imaginations? At this precise moment Edi had lost his spectacles; he was leaning down, feeling for them, on his face the helpless expression of a man from whom things have suddenly vanished. At that moment the fatal bullet struck him. No one noticed, there was nobody there to run and help him. And at this precise moment she was seated in his chair in the overheated room, condemned to witness the whole scene and yet be impotent to help, a perpetual victim of a bullet that never struck her.

Should she blame herself for having let him go? Why had she not gone with him? Was it only because of that tradition which for thousands of years has compelled women simply to gaze after their men as they go away and not to run after them?

How stupid was everything that she had done in her life. She was ashamed of her successes as a popular writer, she blushed at the memory of her annoyance when Dion had not commented on her literary triumphs. How unimportant, how superficial all that was. Here, where men were fighting and dying, here and here alone was the beating heart of the world.

Why can one not blot out past hours of undeserved happiness, and smother in oneself the memory of having been so cheaply, stupidly happy!

Time had ceased to advance, for it had no dimensions any more. It made no difference whether it was day or night; there was no term set to her waiting. If Edi were dead, then she was dead too. And this was her sole consolation, that it would be so easy not to survive him. Another consolation was the certainty which only now became absolutely immovable: she loved her husband. For when a beloved person dies, one does not live through it, one dies through it a slow, deliberate death. Life began to run out in the waiting woman; it was as though a slowly increasing coldness were clutching at her. The dying believe that they alone know what it is like to die. Relly believed and knew.

It wasn't until the bell had been rung twice that she opened the door. There stood Mara. She was wearing an expensive grey fur coat, and she was made-up. Relly didn't care for her, and never had. She felt it typical of the woman to arrive at that moment and in that get-up.

'Nothing's come for you. If you'd telephoned I'd have told you. It would have saved you the long trip.'

'I was expecting my husband to be here. I'll wait for him if you don't mind,' Mara said. She undid her coat slowly. At length Relly invited her to take it off.

'I think I should tell you. Vasso has been travelling. He has had to disguise himself, you understand. He's supposed to come here to resume his normal appearance. He couldn't come straight to our place looking the way he does. That's why I'd like to wait for him. I couldn't go to the station to meet him, you understand. Is it all right if I stay here?'

Relly led her to Edi's room. She did not like the secretive methods of these people whom Doino had originally brought to her house. Vasso was clever, polite and reserved. He came two or three times a week to collect his mail. Occasionally Mara came in his place. From time to time strange men had appeared at the door, timid foreigners, and asked for Vasso. They would wait until Vasso or Mara came to fetch them.

'Isn't Edi at home?' Mara asked.

'He's gone. To fight with the *Schutzbund*.'

'He shouldn't have done that on any account. We made an agreement with him that he wouldn't compromise himself in any circumstances. That's the only way he can help the cause. Doino explained it all quite clearly to him at the time. I can't understand how he could have forgotten.'

Relly stared her in the face as though she were only now aware of her presence.

'We were - what was your phrase? - a secret mail-drop, a *rendezvous*. And now you can't use us any more and your revolution that you were always going to make has fizzled out. Your post-box has gone over to the socialist *Schutzbund*, your *rendezvous* has ignored your orders. He's fighting, shooting, being shot at. Meanwhile your husband, the professional revolutionary, travels round in fancy dress and you doll yourself up like a *grande dame* and use this home as an alternative to a station platform.'

Mara didn't reply at once. She resisted the impulse to get up and leave. Relly was a spoiled woman. Spoiled people become cruel if they are left to suffer for long. After a moment she said:

'I don't know whether Vasso is still alive. He couldn't go on with what he was doing. He had to have at least a few days at home so as to be able to see and hear for himself. There was a very great danger that he might be recognised. I don't know whether he's still alive. I must wait for him here, but I can sit in the kitchen or the hall. I don't want to disturb you.'

'It makes no difference to me,' said Relly.

Evening fell slowly. Darkness spread out from the walls, gradually filling the room. For a while Relly, sitting in the bay of the window, was still out of the shadow. Then she, too, and the window, were engulfed.

Relly said:

'If you want to turn on the light the switch is to your left. Shouldn't Vasso be here by now?'

Mara, blinded by the sudden brightness, closed her eyes and remained leaning against the wall.

'Yes, he should be here by now. Perhaps his train is late. Or the trams may only be running as far as the Belt, and he's had to walk from there.'

'Wouldn't you like to telephone? Perhaps the train really is late. Perhaps it hasn't got in yet. Perhaps they stopped it at the frontier.'

'No, thank you, I won't telephone. It must be a long time since you've eaten. Wouldn't you at least like something to drink?'

They went into the kitchen: Stetten soon joined them there.

'Do you know what woke me? I dreamed I was listening to a beautiful woman singing. The sun shone into the room: she was down in the street, singing that song: *Lavender, Fresh Lavender . . .*'

'You've got the tune quite right, professor,' Relly said.

'Yes, it's the only song I really know. Do you think that's why I dreamed about it? I didn't see the singer in my dream, but I know who she was. The woman of my life. Curiously enough, I saw her for the first time yesterday. She gave me an apple and also saved my life.'

The women scarcely listened. They didn't ask him the meaning of this meeting.

'At twenty a man should recognise the purpose of his existence, at thirty the woman of his life, at forty his own truth. At fifty he should have satisfied his thirst for success, at sixty he should be creating something greater than he is himself, and at seventy he should be modest towards his fellows and arrogant towards Heaven. Yet one only recognises the milestone's of one's life when one has long since passed them by.'

The women remained uninterested, even though they could not know that this aphorism of his was a very old one, used on far too many occasions in the past. So he added, discouragedly:

'I formulated that maxim at the age of twenty-five. Most people only see the greater plan after they have definitely failed to carry it out.'

I saw mine so early on that I've always known in advance the exact times of the trains I was going to miss.'

'A splendid performance, professor, but unfortunately only a performance. Do you expect us to admire you and pity you at the same time? Is that not rather a lot to hope for? You can't expect women, openly trembling with fear for the lives of their fighting men, to provide a good audience, an audience worthy of your talents,' Mara said.

'I was only trying to distract you. Doubtless, like my friend Faber, you would say that that is the self-satisfied philosophy of a moribund ruling-class. If I lack seriousness, I may, just for that reason, be of some use to you youngsters in helping you pass an hour more pleasantly; for this is not a time for heroic action, this period of waiting. In dark periods, that is to say almost always, mankind has acted stupidly and evilly; in its lighter hours it has waited for the sun or the moon, for the saviour, the second coming, the classless society. Good men wait, evil men act....'

'...and clever men,' Mara broke in, 'try to distract themselves and others.'

Stetten fell silent. He was afraid he was *de trop*. Relly showed him the room where she had made ready a bed for him. She was particularly friendly, as though she wished to make him forget the sharpness in Mara's tone.

The two women talked together for several hours. After midnight there was a call from Prague. Vasso had had to change his plans at the last moment and had gone straight there. Mara was to join him.

CHAPTER V

I

THE ground was soft and their feet sank into it, as though they had stumbled into marshland. But it was only good, rich soil, soaked through by rain and snow. It stuck in clods to the men's boots and trouser-legs. There was always one of them hanging back who had found the going too heavy; he would try to knock the mud off with his hands or the butt of his rifle.

Edi thought: 'Happy men. It doesn't occur to them that it is their earth that is sticking to them and holding them back. Thank God they aren't spoiled!'

Even when the rain stopped for a short time they hardly noticed it, for the air remained damp and watery. The sky seemed to have sunk down to a hundred yards or so above their heads, swathing everything in its vague greyness.

There were about thirty of them and Hofer was their leader. When they thought of the city they had left, the five days of almost uninterrupted fighting and skirmishing seemed to them an unspeakably long period of time. They were grown men so a year was not for them a great period. Yet to measure the immeasurable duration of those five days they would have had to be divided into their innumerable component minutes, each one of which was improbably long. As they left they knew that Red Vienna was defeated. Now they must try to reach the frontier. There were other groups attempting to do the same. Until the frontier was reached they wouldn't dare let the weapons out of their hands; the enemy who pursued them could suddenly appear, for he was everywhere and they were surrounded.

The countryside was flat. Hofer had ordered them to move across it in extended open order. When they had first crossed the Danube they had done so. The men were silent; even the makers of jokes had lost their urge to talk, and for the first time each one of them was entirely alone with his thoughts. After a while they began to draw closer to one another; being alone and silent had become too hard to bear. The long, open line broke up into small, separate groups that followed one another.

Edi was exaggeratedly wide awake and alert. Only occasionally did he feel himself dragged down by a hitherto unknown exhaustion as by a fearful weight. It soon passed. He carried the machine-gun that he'd taken from the wounded Ukrainian. It lay heavily on his shoulder, but he felt strong enough. He thought the entire time about Relly, though that thought remained buried, as it were, and independent of what was consciously going through his mind. If Relly had suddenly materialised at his side he wouldn't have been surprised.

He saw himself, and the others too, in an unusually crude light which had nothing to do with the murky daylight. Hofer came over to him and said:

'Well, comrade doctor, isn't it getting a bit heavy? I'll take the M.G. for a bit.'

He was already carrying three carbines. When Edi refused the offer he said:

'I was glad when you came at once, on Monday. What with your spectacles, I'd never have believed you were such a good shot. Did you realise from the beginning . . .'

'Yes, I never had any doubt that it was hopeless. And on Monday evening, when I saw we were still on the defensive, I knew there wasn't a chance of our winning. Imagine the railways not striking!'

'Are you sorry now?'

'No, not at all. This defeat is victory compared to what happened in Germany last year. At least we Austrians have been spared the humiliation of surrendering without a fight.'

Edi, listening to his own words, thought how absurd he sounded. He had never worried less about politics than during these past few days; and now it all came out in ready-made formulæ, as though he hadn't worked these phrases out for himself, but had learned them off parrot-fashion.

'The men are dead tired,' Hofer said, 'that's why we're making such poor time. In half an hour they can catch us up.'

And he dropped back to hurry on the stragglers.

2

'Funny, isn't it? I've spent my whole life in those parts and this is the first time I've ever realised what Heiligenstadt means - the saints' town.'

'What's funny about that? You're the funny one. Every place has a name. Take Deutsch-Wagram we just went through. Wagram doesn't mean anything.'

'I don't know,' a cautious voice put in. 'I think Peppi's right. Everything means something. When you've got it you take it for granted. When we lived in Heiligenstadt we didn't think about its name, it seemed obvious. Now that we've gone the name's all we've got left. It's like when a young chap dies, his name's all that's left. No, everything means something. You've just got to know what it is.'

The three men walked on past him. Edi was standing still for a moment, settling the M.G. in another position on his shoulder. Then he joined a group of stragglers. Under Hofer's encouragement they were trying to make better time.

'Yes, if you could know everything in advance, it'd be fine. For example, I remember ...'

The man told his story at great length. It seemed that on one occasion during the war he had found himself in a deserted dugout with a couple of other men and a stupid young platoon commander. They'd been sent out on a patrol and had lost their way. They'd been

stuck there for two days with nothing to eat and had come near to murdering the patrol leader for his incompetence. When at last they'd found their way back, they'd discovered that in their absence the Italians had completely wiped out their trench. All their comrades had been killed by grenades.

'As I always say, you never can tell. Perhaps if we went more slowly and even rested for an hour or so, it'd turn out better. They may be looking out for us, up ahead, then when they're fed up with waiting for us and it's dark, we could slip through to the frontier without any fuss.'

His listeners were too tired to argue with him. The man realised that he could go on talking for hours without fear of being interrupted. But for the moment he had nothing more to say.

After a time a young man began to speak. His voice was thick with tiredness and he lisped a little. 'He's just a year old, my kid. Whenever he sees me he laughs and pulls at my moustache; he enjoys it and you'd never believe how strong he is already. Last time, though . . . I don't know, it seems almost like he must have guessed . . . he just stayed there without moving, staring at me . . . just staring at me like that. . . .'

At first they couldn't be sure if it was a shot. Then came a burst of rapid fire. They had all fallen flat, and nobody was hurt. The firing soon grew more distant, coming from somewhere on the other side of the River Russ. They closed up together. Hofer said that they must reckon on their pursuers coming back soon. They'd had a rest, that lot, and they could move fast. Therefore, they must hurry and the stragglers must put their last ounce of energy into it. Another couple of hours' going, nine or at the most ten or perhaps eleven kilometres, and they'd be there.

Hans, the little Ukrainian, didn't agree. He spoke with difficulty, as though he'd suddenly forgotten his German, and while he spoke blood dribbled from the corners of his mouth. He spat frequently, gobbets of half-dried blood.

There was still the machine-gun, with three hundred and twenty rounds. That wasn't a lot of ammo, but by shooting it cleverly and carefully it should be possible to keep off their pursuers, even forty or fifty of them, for several valuable minutes, particularly from where they now were. A one-man fox-hole with an earth rampart, since there were so many of them and they had spades, could be dug in two minutes.

'I can't go any further, but I'm the best machine-gunner of us all. For a job like this I don't need a number two. So I'll stay behind.' That was all he had to say.

'A good idea,' Hofer said. 'But we'll all draw lots for who stays behind.'

'No,' said Hans. 'No drawing lots. Look, Comrade Hofer.'

He opened his coat. They saw that his jacket and his shirt were stiff with dried blood. And it was still trickling down.

'A lung wound,' Hofer said with anxiety. 'You got it crossing the Danube, didn't you? Why didn't you say so at once? You should have, comrade.'

Hans stopped him with a gesture. There was no time to lose, and they began to dig the hole at once. Edi set up the machine-gun. There was no word spoken. It was time they went on, but no one moved. Hofer walked over to the little trench and began:

'Comrades!'

Hans interrupted:

'Get going. Good luck, and get back safely. Don't forget, after February comes October, and that's going to be our show.'

Hofer shook him by the hand, and so did the others. Edi was the last.

'Take off my shoes,' said Hans. 'Take them with you. Some comrade may need them. In the soles there are papers. Deliver them when you get to Prague. They've got the woman's address on them. Tell her I wrote the notes during the battle, in the quiet moments. There were a lot of important things I left out, particularly the tactical aspects. But everything that seemed most important to me is in those papers. She's to uphold my views on the national question as strongly as she can in the committee. Tell her that this time the Polish comrades were right. Now run, or you'll be left behind.'

Edi hesitated:

'Haven't you any personal message for me to take her. I mean, she'll ask me if you sent her one, won't she?'

'What is there to say? She knows everything already. I've no last words.'

It seemed to Edi that never before had a man been so close to him, so important to him. He would have liked to embrace him, but Hans was busy adjusting the machine-gun. He had buttoned up his curious, dark-blue overcoat with the black velvet collar. Edi stood there, the shoes in his hand. He couldn't go away like this.

'I'm going, comrade Hans.'

But Hans made no movement. Edi wanted to tell him that he'd catch cold, without his shoes in the damp and muddy fox-hole. It was all nonsense. He felt tears coming, so he turned away and ran after the others.

From the moment that Hans felt the sudden blow in his back followed, with his next breath, by a slight pain and a strange, pleasant sensation of warmth, from then on Hans was alone, forced into a solitude such as he had never known before. At that moment the language of his comrades, which had become his own language, seemed to him once again foreign. He had difficulty in stopping himself from answering their questions in his native tongue.

Now the others were gone, and at last he was really alone. This was a good way to die. There was nothing to listen to, nothing to see. It had stopped raining again, but the sky still hung low over his head. On such days there is no dusk. 'When today is over, then I'll be over too,' Hans thought. He was freezing with cold. He had lost too much blood already. And yet, whenever it became difficult for him to breathe, he felt again that curious, violent heat run through him. Time passed slowly.

The soldiers were coming straight towards him. He listened to their regular footsteps. They were stamping their feet on the ground, as though they wanted to make themselves heard a long way off. He couldn't find the machine-gun. He had suddenly gone blind. No, he could see, but only what seemed to be the reflection of objects. Now he could distinguish the soldiers' square-topped caps, the *Konfederatkas*, quite clearly. But they had already taken him prisoner once, and he couldn't remember when it was that he had escaped.

He opened his eyes. He was lying against the breastwork of his trench. How long had he slept? He wanted to clear his throat but he couldn't, and the attempt to do so was indescribably agonising. He was amazed to discover that death could smother a man so slowly. He noticed that he was now wide awake. Still they didn't come. Another half hour and the comrades would be safe.

The roan horse pawed the ground with its right fore-hoof; it didn't want to go in the water. The pealing of the bells became clearer all the time. When at last it stopped he could hear, quite plainly, the voice of Hanusia, half singing: 'Havrilo! Where are you?' He wanted to answer, but he couldn't. Now she was standing before him. She was beautiful. It was hot, very hot. The roan had disappeared, and he wanted to tell Hanusia how remarkable it was. But it wasn't Hanusia at all, it was Hofer's wife. She said, in Ruthenian: 'If you die now poor Franzl's mother will be all alone. You must remember that, comrade Rybnik.' He wanted to ask: 'How do you know my real name?' And he wept and turned away his head so that she would not see his tears.

He didn't know whether he had slept and dreamed, or whether it was the fever. His face was damp. Was it the rain, which had started again? Or had he really wept? He couldn't tell.

People don't die crying: 'Long live the world revolution!' if there is no one there to hear them cry. In spite of everything, his end would be like his grandfather's, who had died of tuberculosis. Life can be changed: death is always the same.

Hans now thought that he was completely awake. He was thirsty, but his water-bottle was empty. He was freezing. He could curl up in the bottom of the fox-hole. He'd hear if anyone came. No, that would be too late. He mustn't let them come nearer than three hundred yards. He tried to get up, but he couldn't draw breath. He'd feel better in a minute. He would lean on the machine-gun and stay standing till the end. No, no, he wouldn't let them through here.

Someone called him. He would answer right away, in just a minute, right away.

He didn't answer. He died. Nobody had called him.

CHAPTER VI

I

'THE bridges in this town are beautiful. Somebody once told me that beautiful bridges in a big city are an encouragement to suicide. I forget why. It seems there are statistics to prove it,' said Soennecke as they walked over the Charles Bridge.

Josmar remained silent. There were so many important matters to be discussed – which was why he'd asked Soennecke to meet him – and now they had already wasted an hour wandering about the town instead of going to the hotel. Soennecke seemed to be deliberately avoiding all serious topics.

'A propos of statistics, the comrades don't altogether agree with your figures. There, too, they say, you show a tendency to over-estimate the enemy, and as for our strength . . .'

Sonnecke interrupted him:

'Prague certainly is a beautiful city. Perhaps it's bad for refugees to live in such a lovely place, or so far from the frontier. Courage increases in geometrical progression according to the distance from the German border. Are there many suicides among the refugees here?'

'I don't know. I don't think so,' Josmar replied with bad grace. 'Wouldn't it be better if we went straight to the hotel? I could explain everything in detail to you there. You'll be seeing the comrades tomorrow morning at the latest. They know you're due here today.'

'Relax, Josmar, relax. You've been here several days now. You've spent quiet nights, and days when you know no one can do you any harm. Yet even during the worst times at home I've never seen you so jumpy.'

'I'm not jumpy, but I am nervous. Seen from here, everything seems different somehow. You'll see it yourself, we've made mistakes.'

'I doubt that. You mark my words, my lad, refugees are always full of hot air. Maybe we can't always see clearly back home; by comparison with us, the people here are stone blind. You should know more than these *wot-cho* fellows; they're excellent at writing resolutions, but men don't have eyes in their arse, and I've never heard of a fart that threw light on anything. I'm not going to the hotel because an old friend of mine lives in *Kleinseite*. Not a Party member, but a genuine, proper person all the same. I feel at home there. I don't have to say I'm coming, either. That has its advantages, too.'

He said goodbye to Josmar at a street corner and told him he would see him next day. Josmar ran after him.

'One moment. I haven't had a chance to tell you anything. You're going to see Irma now, I imagine. You should know that . . . I mean, it would be better. . . .'

'What is it? Stop stammering, Josmar. What should I know and what do you mean? I know you never liked her.'

'You were in bad odour even before they read your report. Irma had been repeating things you said to her. They said it was pure defeatism, liquidationism, conciliationism. Irma . . .'

'Good. Thank you, Josmar. Until tomorrow, then!'

The bridges in the town were beautiful, and so were many of the old houses and some of the new ones too. And it seemed to Josmar that he had never before seen so many handsome women.

He went on waking up just before first light, and he still listened for footsteps behind him. The freedom with which the people here talked still struck him as strange, upsetting and even suspicious. He wanted to avoid the company of the émigrés, since he would have to be going back; and so he lived under a false name again, and had no contacts except with the leaders of the Party. He was out of danger here, but he had to live as though he were still threatened. He didn't belong

among this rear echelon; he had come from the front, for a short time, to receive fresh orders before returning.

These days it was particularly difficult to be alone. Shattering news kept coming in from Vienna, Linz, Bruck. One by one the beaten fighters began to arrive. It was not yet quite clear what the authoritative verdict was on the subject of that hopeless struggle. It had been led by social democrats. His people had surrendered a year ago in Germany, and without a fight.

Josmar heard that Edi had taken part. He was glad about that and went to look for him. He was easily found.

He learned that Vasso had arrived. He had gone with the others to meet Doino at the station, though this was against the rules of conspiracy that he normally obeyed.

At first it seemed to him that all these people had changed a great deal; then, that they had all remained exactly the same. That proved nothing. He knew that he himself had become a different person, but nobody seemed to notice it.

2

This town had accommodated many sorts of refugees. The Russians had been the first to arrive. They had believed that the revolution at home would collapse very soon, and they had rented rooms by the day, the most pessimistic by the week. They had stayed for months, which slowly became years. Many moved on, to the west or the south-east. They had a great deal to do; during thousands of days they had done it in many different places, and it was always the same: they were getting ready to go home.

Soon after them came the Hungarians. They thought that the counter-revolution at home would soon be over and that they themselves would be the leaders of their nation once again. The exiles came from Poland, Rumania, from Italy and the Balkans and the Baltic states.

As though it had been ordered by law, or by the police, each group of refugees tended to congregate in one particular quarter of the town. Each one had its own café and its own cheap restaurant. The agents of their enemies could thus easily find them. The houses of the émigrés soon assume the characteristics of a ghetto. The natives, living on the same floor, started at first by being sympathetic and helpful to them. Later they became distrustful and irritated. Finally, when the weeks had become months and the months had turned into years, they became totally indifferent.

There were schisms within each group, caused by the changes in the situation back home, by sly agents from the enemy, by the quarrels and jealousies of the women, by the vainness of the older men and the ambitions of the younger. Hatred for the common enemy, which had originally driven them here, became thin and rhetorical; their real hatred was directed against their companions in misfortune, against the man with whom they had shared a cell in prison, their fear and courage during the escape, their bed and the foreign crust during the first days of exile. With him, too, they had shared the great hope. He could not be forgiven the fact that it had come to nothing. Disappointment could not be shared, and the new illusions they no longer had in common. Comradeship ceased when they began to hate the witness to the past as the creator of an intolerable present. Only an identical 'line', a common 'platform', could keep these centrifugal people together. Only if the other man said exactly what one thought oneself, only if one repeated back exactly what the other man had said, was it possible for them to stand one another's company. The mother tongue was no longer a link between the exiles, for the various jargons cut across it.

The German group had only been in existence for a year. So it was old, for it, too, had started by reckoning in days and weeks. For them, too, it had seemed at first that changes of the moon and the revolving seasons could only be of importance to the natives of the land.

They had come as though driven by the scorching wind of huge bonfires. It was as if their eyebrows and eyelashes had been singed, as if there were about their clothes a smell of burning which could not be dispelled. They vacillated unexpectedly between uncontrollable garrulosity and sad silence. They were the witnesses of a débâcle at whose dimensions they could guess but could not measure, and whose causes remained for them inexplicable. The enemy had conquered them, but they had not fought. They wanted to search out the blame and find the guilty men. Here, safely abroad, the communists discovered that the proletariat had not been defeated, that the Communist Party had carried out an orderly, tactical withdrawal, and that their leadership, always in the right, always in control of the situation, had appraised everything correctly and had arranged for all eventualities. Such was the opinion of the leaders themselves. And since they were always right, their opinion was the correct one.

They learned here that the social democratic trades unions, the strongest organisation in Germany, had tried to come to terms with the enemy. They had thus betrayed their own cause and gone down with it. The enemy knew that anyone who tried to bargain with him

was either too weak or too cowardly to fight. He had, therefore, reached for his weapons, which was all that was needed, and had been victorious.

The émigrés began to argue, violently and without method, like a man who has very little time since he may at any moment be called away to perform the most important act of his life.

They printed newspapers, pamphlets, books, and these were smuggled into the homeland. The émigrés were not only the powerful voice, they were also the brains of the movement. The movement might be smitten in every limb, but so long as the brain remained alive it could never really be destroyed.

Prague was the centre. The old city had seen much, the powerful in ruins and the desperate triumphant. Its historic shrines, like all the others in the world, had become ends in themselves. They remind only him who needs no reminder that greatness and victory are hollow. They teach no one, for their stones only speak to him who can give them his own memories and lend them his own words.

The town was not too far from the frontier. In fact, it lay too near to too many frontiers. Here many roads crossed. It was a city of encounters. In such a city opinions ripen and decisions are pronounced, though they may well have been taken elsewhere.

Since wherever émigrés are becomes for them a no man's land, since nowhere can they put down roots, they quickly forget about the law of growth. And they would forget death itself, if death forgot the émigrés as quickly as did the people who were supposed to be missing them, back home.

3

With hesitation, almost against his will, Josmar took his first steps among the émigrés. He was drawn towards the comrades; they knew so much that had been hidden from him inside the country. He was tempted to tell them fully and in detail about the events in which he had been personally involved. But this he had been strictly forbidden to do. This was partially like the excitement of being a member of a congress. Here, in a small space, one met all the people whom one had once known and had not seen for some time, and many whom one knew without ever having met them before. He had been told to avoid all encounters, yet it was inevitable that he meet them all.

He read the papers, printed for distribution in the homeland, but which he himself had never seen there. What was stated in them about

conditions at home was untrue, as he saw at once. And surely he knew more about that than these *émigrés*? But he soon gave in: it was clear that he had misunderstood the Party line, that he had not grasped the Party's appreciation of the situation. It was made plain to him that the error, the still scarcely perceptible deviationism from the only true path, was not his responsibility but Soennecke's. He stood up for Soennecke, naturally, but no longer so forcibly as of old.

And then there was Irma. Soennecke loved her, and that concerned no one except himself. She'd left the country immediately after the Reichstag fire. Meanwhile Soennecke had met her whenever he had gone abroad. He must have confided matters to her, such as his worries and doubts about the Party line, which he had kept hidden from everybody else including Josmar. And why had she repeated such things and passed them on? Was her loyalty to the Party so much greater than her love for him?

And Soennecke, whom many people accused of being over-cautious and over-subtle, why had he noticed nothing? Or was it possible that with a man like Soennecke even love itself might have its political significance? Josmar was appalled by the idea; he was still very young.

Soennecke turned up at the prearranged café, punctual to the minute, as always. Irma was with him. Josmar had made up his mind to say nothing as long as she was there. But she soon went away. Soennecke was very quiet, but thoughtful, almost sad.

'You're right, Josmar. Irma has been chattering, not maliciously, but simply to make herself appear important. She's very young, you know. For the rest, it makes no difference. I've nothing to hide. We'll fight it out to the end.'

'Yes,' Josmar replied, hesitantly. He had no idea what it was that they were to fight out to the end. There could be no fighting against the Party. The Party always knew: no one could be against it and still be right; not even Soennecke.

'Of course, if the Party decides against me I shall give in. But if I do, it'll be with the certain conviction that every working man sitting in a concentration camp will have the right to spit in my face because he's a brave man and I'm a coward. For this time I'm right. And this time if I give in, then . . .'

Soennecke fell silent. He examined for a moment Josmar's face which he knew so well; he gazed at the marble top of the table at which they were seated; he let his eyes rest on the incomprehensible, almost unpronounceable name of the Czech newspaper which an old

man at the next table was reading. It was as though he wished to register his impressions and thus preserve the memory of this moment in which he realised for the first time that he had been betrayed, that he was now alone, and that there was no point in finishing his sentence. Yet he had no conscious intention of registering his impressions. His glance strayed hither and thither, because only the insignificance of commonplace objects could sooth him.

Josmar went with him as far as the house where the meeting between Soennecke and the leaders was to be held. As they separated Soennecke said:

'Don't worry, Josmar. There won't be any break. If need be I'll give in.'

Josmar said quickly:

'Doino and Vasso are both here. Perhaps you should talk to them before . . . before you make up your mind.'

'Those two! Each of them hides his real thoughts even from himself. They give in before anybody even asks them to. In any case, it's too late, I must go up now.'

4

They quickly drew back from the awkward embrace, both of them with the same sharp movement. Vasso looked around the room, as if he wanted first of all, in his customary way, to make sure that it was safe. The walls were lined with books from floor to ceiling.

Then he said:

'At last. It's far too long a time since I last saw you.' And, after a pause: 'You're going grey, Doino, and you're too thin.'

'You haven't changed at all, Vasso. I've often thought of you and Mara.'

'She'll be here today or tomorrow. We'll have to move to Prague now. It won't be possible to go on with the work in Vienna.'

They spoke of events in Austria. Vasso had reported in late autumn that the shooting would start at the earliest in December, or at the latest in February, and that the social democrats would fight. From 'on high' he had been curtly informed that neither in December nor in February nor at any other time nor in any other place would the social democrats ever fight. And he was told that he should stop spreading such nonsense, since it could only help the social democrats, who were the enemy.

'Suppose they had believed you,' Doino asked. 'Would it have made any difference to the outcome of that hopeless battle?'

'No battle is hopeless from the start unless it is fought without a fanatical will to conquer. Every war is full of surprises, and civil wars consist of nothing else. A bridge that someone has forgotten to blow, a locomotive uncoupled from the carriages at the last moment, incidents like that can decide the outcome of a battle and sometimes of a war.'

Doino was silent. Since being at liberty he had suffered from sudden spasms of physical weakness more frequent than those he had ever experienced in the camp. They were accompanied by a sensation of giddiness, so that if he was standing at the time he had to grasp hold of a piece of furniture. At these moments he would be overcome by such a feeling of helplessness that his eyes would fill with tears.

Vasso went on, without looking at him:

'And is that why you didn't fight, when it was up to you, last year, in Germany? How I loathe all that chatter about hopeless battles. As though any revolution had ever approached its object by any other means except hopeless battles. The Commune was hopeless, 1905 was hopeless, yes, even the October revolution was actually hopeless. It's bound to be so, because life itself is hopeless unless it has a guarantee against the certainty of death in a feeling of eternity, of social duration.'

'I like to listen to you, Vasso. In my dreams I often heard your voice. You have no idea how important his dreams are to a prisoner. A year ago I was ready and eager to fight, and I knew it was pointless, but at that time I was quite willing to die. Is it revolutionary, to be willing to die? I don't think it is.'

'Why did you want to die? Did you think everything was lost for ever?'

'No. Everything is never lost. I knew that a year ago, too.'

'Then why did you want to die?'

'Forgive me, but I'm weak and I need a great many words to make my meaning clear. It was partially the knowledge that I had foreseen everything that was happening and that I'd scarcely admitted it even to myself. And I'd said nothing. Another thing . . .'

Vasso interrupted him:

'And now you're not going to say nothing?'

'No. I shall go on being silent. By which I mean that I'll praise the Party and everything the Party does at the top of my voice. You see, I'm thinking of the comrades who are still in the camps. They believe in the Party. What else is left for them to believe in? I shall remain loyal to them. Have you left the Party, then? You're far more im-

portant to the cause than I am, and what you say is still listened to. And yet you don't speak up.'

‘I do. And that's why I'll soon be put entirely on the shelf.’

‘All the same, Vasso, you don't say anything. You let them put you on the shelf, and still you stay in the Party. I know you're still hoping to be able to change it one day, provided you can avoid being expelled. The reason I say nothing, the reason I stay in, is that if you should manage to succeed I want to be there with you.’

‘Doino, you won't be there, and it's just because I won't have people like you with me that I won't succeed. It's men like Karel who'll decide. In a few months or a few years he'll be in a position to dare to tell the people in my country that I'm an enemy agent, or that I stole a horse, or that I took money from Party funds, or all three at the same time. And you won't stand up to defend me.’

‘Karel wouldn't ever dare slander you. And, as for me, I should defend you.’

Vasso glanced through the pile of books on the table. He asked, without turning round:

‘I suppose you lost your library?’

‘Yes, they took it all, or destroyed it. I have nothing any more.’

‘You have good friends. You won't lack for anything. And you can write.’

‘Yes, I can. Are you worried about me, then?’

‘No. I just wanted to make sure. If you stay here the Party will offer you a job. You'll have a hard time refusing it.’

‘I'll refuse.’

‘Yes? And since you said you'd defend me, I think you should know Soennecke's here. I haven't seen him yet, but I know he's on the skids. If you were being genuine, here's your chance to defend somebody who really needs help. And deserves it, too. Or don't you admire him as much as you used to?’

‘I think very highly of him, but he's another non-speaker, a silent chatterer like us. What's happened to him, then?’

‘I imagine he'll tell you himself. You're fresh from a concentration camp, which gives you a standing that you can make use of for perhaps another forty-eight hours. They'll all ask you questions as though you were convalescing from an illness; they'll all be very nice to you, even the ones who don't like you at all. And the only one who won't have asked you any questions or enquired about your physical condition will have been me. Despite all that, I'm the one you dream about.’

‘What's the matter, Vasso? Why are you so unhappy?’

'I'm not unhappy. I'm just more worried than usual. I went home for a few days. No one here knows about that, except Mara, of course. Karel - you'll see him, he's here, they're all here - Karel mustn't hear about it. I'm going to go back and start working on the spot again. The bosses won't allow that. And when they say I'm not to do so, I've decided what I'll do. It's a heavy decision to have made. And now I know that I can't rely on you any more.'

'What sort of a decision?'

'I won't tell you. I'd rather let you go on dreaming about me in peace a little longer.'

Vasso stayed a while. When Stetten was brought into the room he quickly said goodbye. He promised to bring Mara to a little party that was to be given in two days' time, in Doino's honour by the man he was staying with and his friends.

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Edi stayed near the frontier until he found out what had happened to Hans. He even thought of going back with a few comrades to fetch his body. The patrol that had found him dead in his fox-hole had left him lying there.

But the comrades were tired, and Hofer thought it a senseless undertaking. He was the only one of them all who knew how valuable a man Hans had been, but his corpse was of no value. It wouldn't have been right to risk anyone's life on its account.

Only now, Hofer thought, did it really all depend on each individual. They had lost the battle and crossed the border into a foreign land, yet they did not feel that they had been defeated. They would soon go back and resume the struggle in another form. Meanwhile each man must take care of himself and make it his business to get his strength back. Later, after they'd won, they would bury their many dead; for the time being they must let the enemy, who was temporarily victorious, dispose of the corpses as he saw fit.

Edi had to admit that Hofer was right. All the same the memory of Hans was continually before his eyes; he saw him as he had left him, standing almost upright in the little trench beside the machine-gun. This vision of the man who had died, at a lost post and for a lost cause, moved him in a manner which he could not have put into words.

As a young officer in the war he had seen many of his comrades die, and death had always severed the link between them and him. Now, for the first time, he felt that death had bound him to another man.

And this man, to whom he felt so inexpressibly close, was a man he had scarcely known.

He went to Prague. The day he arrived he went to find the woman for whom the letter and the papers were destined. He had to call twice, for she worked in a factory and was out until the evening. She had a furnished room in somebody else's flat, a tiny room behind the kitchen. One of the many children of the people who owned the flat was sick, and for minutes on end its strangled screams filled her room, interrupting their conversation and oppressing them both. Edi didn't dare suggest that they go somewhere else to talk, to a café, for instance. He handed the woman the papers at once. She read the letter and glanced through the others. When she raised her eyes and looked at him - he didn't trust himself to tell her that Hans was dead - it seemed to him that he had seen this woman often before. He couldn't be confusing her with someone else, for there could only be one such face in the world. Yet he couldn't think where he might have seen her.

She said:

'I was his wife. He left me four years ago. He often wrote because he wanted to stay in touch with the comrades here through me. Is he dead?'

Edi nodded. She wished to know how Hans had died. Edi told her what he knew. She astounded him by saying, calmly:

'It was easy for him to die bravely. He was always frightened of death, but he was proud and he was never afraid of dying. And if he'd been able to fire a last burst at the enemy, before receiving the *coup de grâce* himself, it would have had a decorative value which he appreciated, though he would never admit it. To die quite alone, far from any intimacy, he must have enjoyed that. Tell me, do you think he was affected?'

'No,' Edi replied, angrily, 'Not at all, I think of him with profound admiration.' All the same, he couldn't help remembering the shoes. Was it affected of Hans to think of them at such a moment? He had said that dead men need no shoes. That's true enough, but it's the living who think such thoughts. For a man about to die, was it affected?

Edi added:

'I admire him, and I think of him as a true and great friend. And, I am sorry to say, I hardly knew him.'

Once again the wild, tortured screams of the child made them fall silent. She sat, tall and thin, on the edge of the bed. There was only room for one chair in the little room, and she had given that to him.

She gazed at him steadily with her great, dark eyes, yet he could not have said whether or not she saw him.

'I knew him,' she said, when the child had calmed down again. 'We grew up together in the same village, next door to one another. I never admired him. One doesn't admire God. I loved him and was frightened of him. I began to run behind him when I was five and he was seven. I was the only woman he ever loved; he never touched another. I knew him so well that I could tell you what he's thinking about now, in his fox-hole. Except that dead men don't think.'

'I wish you'd tell me all about him. Forgive me, it's probably tactless, but . . .'

She interrupted him with an impatient gesture. He fell silent and waited.

'In our village,' she began at last, 'the huts, the walls and the floor are made of rubble, and the roofs are thatched with straw. On the hill above the village stands the castle of the Polish count. Wherever you are in the village you can see it.'

'We have four seasons like anybody else, but our countryside is autumnal and with each new season something of the autumn mysteriously returns. On the finest day of May the sky will be covered with heavy black clouds that reach down to the cottage chimneys. Everything is hidden behind walls of rain, except the castle of the Polish count: wherever you may be you can still see that. The silver birches stand guard in front of it. It may be full summer when the heavy corn sways on the count's fields that stretch to the far horizon; in the stony plots of the peasants it is already autumn, though the potatoes that grow there have not yet been dug up.'

'The apples on the trees, the fishes in the lake, everything belongs to the count. The peasant buys dried herrings from the town. He pays the Jew for them with the eggs that the peasants don't dare eat. Only at Easter the women paint them, and they are taken up to the castle, a present from the villagers. The count and his people are amazed by the brightness of the colours we use, and his son understands the meaning of the designs.'

'Rooks nest all over our village. They perch on the broken fences and settle on the ploughs. In their cawing we hear the voice of autumn every day lest the countryside should for a moment forget to remind us. They are everywhere except up in the count's demesne.'

'The discontented in our village are beyond number, yet no one thinks of changing the state of affairs. Many wander off, to America or Canada or Australia. Some come back driven across the seas by

homesickness. Coins chink in their trouser pockets, and in a little bag, slung across their necks underneath the cross, they carry the foreign banknotes. The count sells them a piece of land on the edge of his immeasurable estates. Yet come the hail, or a summer when the ears of corn refuse to ripen, then those peasants grow poor again. They didn't have enough money to pay for the insurance. The fields return to the count. The lightning never strikes his houses, but it sets fire to the peasants' huts and then the village is invisible for smoke. But above the smoke, bright and easily seen from wherever you may be standing, rises the castle of the lord with the silver birches in front.

‘Yet nowhere else in the world do people sing as much as they do in our village. There is the feel of autumn in our songs, even on the hottest summer nights. It is only when we sing our songs that the rooks fall silent. It is only when we sing that the castle of the count is hidden behind its silver birch trees: then it no longer looks down on us and we can forget it. But Hans never forgot the castle.’

She stopped talking. Edi was afraid she wouldn't tell him any more. And yet she had so far said nothing that really interested him. Was it really of any importance that that little red-haired man, with the mathematician's acute brain and the amazingly hard determination, should have come from some ultimate, most dreadful village in Eastern Galicia? Was it possible that somewhere it was always autumn, that there were no larks or nightingales but only rooks.

He was sure that the woman wasn't addressing her words to him. It was not for him that she was clumsily translating into German this long text that she had apparently learned by heart, preparing and arranging each involved sentence as she came to it. Yet he remained beneath her spell. Oppressed by a confused sensation, confused and illogical as a dream. He had often met this woman, at one time she had been important to him, but all he knew about her was that he had forgotten everything. Her face told him that they shared a secret, but it didn't tell him what that secret was.

The child next door began to scream again. Its screams became sobs, and then subsided into whimpers. He asked:

‘But how did the village child become the man he was? He knew a lot. Where did he learn it? Where did you yourself learn what you know?’

He was not sure whether she had heard him, but she began to talk again:

‘Ours was not the only village. There were many others like it, and behind them lay the world, from which guests came to the castle, from

which orders and sometimes even a letter came for the peasants. Into this world the village sent its young men each year. They were gone for a few years. Not all of them came back from the barracks. Some lost the way, no one knew where or how. Others, who feared the sergeant-major more than death itself, put a noose round their necks, one quiet Sunday afternoon in the deserted barrack-room.

'Those who did come back had a great many stories to tell. The town had made them into men of the world. They had often eaten meat and drunk coffee, they had found strange women and loved them for a few minutes. When they came back the village seemed to them small and unbearably poor. Yet they forgot the world quickly enough. The village was big enough for their poverty, and the dried herrings were too expensive to be despised.'

'When the war started the men left the village. At first the young ones who had only just got back from the town, and then the others. Only those who were too young or too old or crippled remained behind. At that time Havrido – your Hans – was fifteen. He could read, but there were hardly any books in the village. The priest had four books, the teacher perhaps fifteen. They both had many children with few toys. So even from these few books a lot of the pages were missing. Havrido read them all, two or three times. Thus he knew by heart *The Famous and Heroic Chronicle of our Glorious Imperial and Royal Army during the Venetian Campaign*, and not quite so well *A Truthful and Marvellous History of Our Holy Martyrs, etc., etc. Together with Numerous life-like Illustrations, Pictures and Representations of Visions*. Then there was *The Beast in Human Form, Being the Absolutely True, Horrifying and Highly Instructive Story of the Emperor Napoleon, Now by God's Mercy in Hell*. Besides these there was a *Decameron* and a *Don Quixote*, a *Hand-book of Assistance in the Writing of Love Letters*, and a number of loose pages from a book in which it was proved that the false Dmitri was the true Dmitri and the true Dmitri the false one.'

'Havrido could write, better with his left hand than with his right, but he seldom had occasion to do so. As far as farming went he knew as much as did the peasants, which was not a great deal. He could sing as well as anyone in the village and he could play the harmonica. He could tell the time by the sun, and by the priest's behaviour at mass he could estimate how many glasses he had drunk on an empty stomach.'

'Was it on account of those books that he knew so early in life, and so much more exactly than anyone else, that life in our village and in the other villages was not the way it should be? Had the history of the saints taught him that things were not always like this? Had he dis-

covered from the story of the false Dmitri that the castle was not unassailable and that our village life was not based on eternal, inalienable right?

'In those summer days, when the war was still so new that it seemed more like a vague promise than a threat, the village seemed for the first time to have been forgotten by the autumn. The rain kept off, and the sky seemed as everlasting blue as the eyes of the tow-headed village children. It seemed right that it should be so, for thus the little puffs of white cloud, where the cannons were firing beyond the horizon, remained clearly visible and were not confused with real clouds. Yet the emperor's soldiers were beaten. We could hear them marching past along the highroad, particularly at night, for they made a lot of noise and woke the sleeping village. Isolated groups even came into the village. They were tired men who didn't understand our language. They didn't believe we were as poor as we said, and their impatience might have been dangerous if they had not been so tired. They stayed with us for a day or a night or an hour before they vanished behind the hill. Only the dogs went a little way with them.

'With the first days of autumn the last of the emperor's soldiers passed through. They came by night and woke the village. They behaved as though they would lie for ever in our huts, but they left the same night, before even their clothes had dried or their meal was cooked. They left behind them a cadet, a boy who had been severely wounded. The villagers were told to look after him and to hide him from the enemy should any of them come that way. The soldiers said that they would return and would either punish us or reward us for the way we had treated the cadet.

'Like his fellows the cadet spoke nothing but German. The old men, who had served the emperor years before, understood him. The priest was not there, for the police had hanged him, and the teacher had disappeared, no man knew where.

'They hid the cadet from the Cossack patrols. They hoped that he would soon get well again so they could put him on his horse and send him away after the others. But he didn't get well. And he didn't die. If the count and his people hadn't left the castle they would have taken him up there. He seemed to belong with them, for he appeared to be rich. He had money, and the linen on his delicate body was finer than the finest that our young brides wore. He had a gold cigarette-case and they even said that his comb was made of silver.

'It became more and more dangerous hiding him from the Russians, and it was too late now to hand him over to them. After the cadet's death-

by agreement they strangled him in his sleep, with all the men of the village standing round – the quarrel about his possessions began. They all distrusted and hated one another. Murderers lived in the huts of our village. The neighbouring villages knew all about it. We were feared, despised and envied because of our rich inheritance.

'That was when Havrilo left the village, intending never to return. Yet he kept coming back, for a night, for a few days, for a few weeks.

'He became coachman to a Jew who had brought white flour and crystallised sugar and raisins from Russia; he worked in the oil wells and in the woods; he travelled with the soldiers on the baggage trains; he helped bury the dead; he brought back wounded horses from the front; he had a job in a soldier's brothel; he was boilerman in a delousing centre for the imperial and royal army.

'One night he came and talked about the revolution. It sounded like a woman's name, and he loved her. He explained it all to me, and when he came back I went away with him, leaving the house and the village. We went to the country of the revolution where they'd got rid of all the gentry and the peasants had become stronger than the castle. I followed him to join the partisans in the Ukraine. We fought in White Russia and near Petrograd. Havrilo was on all fronts during the Civil War. He had become a proper man, old and experienced.

'Had our village ever existed? Were there silver birches to hide the castle? Was there anything that could resist us, any victory that we could not achieve?

'So long as indescribable effort and deadly danger lay between us and victory, so long were we happy. We didn't know that victory was an end; we thought that it would be a beginning.'

As she fell silent, Edi asked:

'Hasn't victory always been an end? Has it ever been a beginning?'

'We believed and we wished that the old state of affairs, which had always existed, would be over, and that a new state, for the first time, would begin.'

'And you were disappointed. There's nothing new in that. When did you notice, when did Havrilo realise, that the victory was being wasted, squandered?'

'Havrilo went off to the places where they were still fighting: to Germany and China. When he came back from Canton he broke with the Party. Since then it's never succeeded in defeating one of its enemies, but it's continually defeated him and people like him. And they'll even dispute his death, the way they disputed and slandered his fight for the villages of his own land.'

‘For we went back. Havrilo hadn’t forgotten the castle or the poverty or our songs. He led the Ruthenian peasants in their struggle against the aristocrats. Behind them the enemy had the police, and behind them the soldiers, the sons of poor Polish peasants. Havrilo addressed the soldiers one day, and the police caught him. Everywhere the crops of the big landowners were burning, for the peasants had set them alight. Yet even then Havrilo escaped death as he had escaped it in the criminally senseless Canton rising.

‘Then we were together again. I began to hope that he would settle down and become accustomed to the state of the world, the way others had done. He wanted to study, to learn a lot, everything in fact. But he decided that we must earn our living as workers. We worked in the factories and studied at night. It was a hard life, but it could have been a fine one.’

She was still seated on the bed, and it still seemed as though she were translating something she had learned by heart into German. Yet without the tense expression leaving her face she began to cry. It was as though she were unconscious of her tears.

‘He was unhappy and he made everyone who came near him unhappy too. He had left the Party, yet the Party remained deep within him, deeper than the memory of some shameful love, more painful than the knowledge of a crime for which one cannot forgive oneself and because of which one wakes up in the night blushing. He couldn’t bear himself and he became unbearable to everyone who loved him. He accused the Party leaders of intolerance, but he was intolerant of any friend who did not agree with him about everything. The qualities that he objected to in the new chiefs became continually more marked in his own character. They became an obsession with him: when he wasn’t talking about them he was always thinking about them and finding new reasons to hate them.

‘He was a virtuous man, and his virtue turned to pride. He was sincere, honourable and true – which made him all the more impatient and unbearable. Even his goodness was still only attractive to strangers. He had no friends any more! He left me because he was always discovering new petit-bourgeois characteristics in me, because on the trades union question I was an ultra-left “deviationist” from his personal line, because I loved him the way a backward peasant girl loves.

‘It was not enough that I believed him absolutely; he left me because I didn’t believe in him any longer.

‘For four years he looked for the death that would put an end to

dying, for he had been dying ever since he left the Party. He's found it now. During those four years I've been looking for my own life and for a man. I've found nothing but the fragments into which he shattered my life, that and the memory of the village. I bought myself a blue exercise-book and I've written it all down so as to be able to tell you bits of it this evening. You've brought me the missing sentence, the last one: "Havrilo died in a foreign land, far from our village. Only thus did he manage not to see the castle as he died. It is still standing. The branches of the silver birches in front of the castle wave in the wind.

*Do you hear, my brother,
My comrades, do you hear
How the rooks are cawing - craa . . . craa . . .*

Havrilo hears nothing any more. He doesn't answer. He is quiet. At last!

CHAPTER VII

I

THE sliding doors had been pushed right back, so that the two rooms became one large one, with plenty of room for the guests to be scattered about, had they so wished. Yet they all seemed almost automatically to converge on the corner where Doino was seated, and whenever he got up he was urged with solicitude to sit down again. The circle around him grew larger, and he might well have felt that now he was out of all danger, his friends close about him to protect him. Stetten and Mara sat on either side of him. When he spoke it sometimes seemed as though his words were addressed only to them. Only much later did his circle break up. They had been drinking, and many of their voices assumed a new tone, many a face seemed changed - becoming harder or softer, more flushed or more pale.

The host had provided everything most handsomely, including cold food and strong drinks. He popped up here and there, stood for a while behind Doino's chair, and quietly slipped away again. He made it easy for his guests to ignore him.

Besides Josmar and Irma, Soennecke had brought along one of the *wot-tcho* men. This one was known to be particularly well in with the Russians. He was regarded as an important theorist, although he had published nothing that wasn't, within a month or two, a disowned or

condemned heresy as a result of the development of events or of a change in the Party line. Yet this suppleness was astounding: he was the first to offer reasons for the disownment to which each of his 'theories' in turn fell victim. He had a little beard which, superficially at least, gave him a certain resemblance to the first leader of the revolution. It was rumoured that he intended to take part in the illegal work inside Germany which was why, here among the émigrés, he was already disguised behind this beard and a pair of spectacles. Also he frequently changed his name so that his real one might be soon forgotten. In their close circle they called him Bärtchen, little beard. He liked that.

'Tell me, Faber,' Bärtchen asked, 'there's been quite a lot of material published about the concentration camps. How far, in the deepest sense of the word, does it get at the essence of the problem? That's what I'd like to know.'

'What is the essence? Does any piece of writing ever get at the essence of anything? The writers have surpassed themselves in describing the beastliness with which our enemies treat their prisoners. Is that the essence? It's been shown that revolutionaries can endure suffering as patiently as saints, and that must be a satisfactory discovery for readers in Moscow or Paris or Prague. The people in the concentration camps, however, ask this: "What's the matter with the Party? What's the matter with the invincible working class? Why has no one attacked the camps? Why haven't they come and set us free by force?"'

'That's not the question, Comrade Faber,' Bärtchen cried impatiently. Vasso said, with irritation:

'Who can say for sure what the question is? Must it always be a man who has come too late and who has the useless answers ready long after everyone else has lost interest? There are some people who are for ever pursing up their lips but who never manage to whistle.'

Doino began again:

'I only wanted to say that it's always been particularly easy for artists to depict suffering. It seems to me questionable whether pain proves anything on behalf of the man who suffers it: I'm quite sure it in no way redounds against the man who inflicts it – at least so history shows. And that's something we revolutionaries shouldn't forget, since it's our intention to make history.'

'Excuse me, but Christianity stems from an act of suffering. And that was universally successful!' Edi put in.

'My good friend Dr Rubin is wrong there,' Stetten said. 'If a resurrected Christ had not appeared in the guise of death's conqueror the early Christians would soon have disbanded. The universal success of

Christianity was brought about by a series of almost world-wide acts of violence. Only when the Christians began to martyr the pagans, only when the last careerist in the Roman Empire saw that it was not only in his interests, but indeed vital, for him to crawl to the Cross, only then did the world become Christian. Perhaps suffering is convincing to those who love the sufferers. I wouldn't know about that. To those who are indifferent it is in the beginning indifferent and soon becomes repulsive. To the persecutors it simply proves that they have hit the bull's eye. Forgive me, my friend, for bringing up this point, but it seems to me the proper moment for an historian to speak up.'

Drinks and sandwiches were passed round.

Mara said:

'Why do you confine yourself to generalisations, Doino? Tell us what struck you personally as important.'

'The professor is quite right. Suffering as such is not the point, Bärtchen now said. He was obviously anxious to win Stetten over to his side. 'The problem is whether a movement is strengthened by sacrifice, hardened in its certainty of ultimate victory, or whether, on the contrary, it becomes weakened and eventually gives up hope. The Russian Bolsheviks showed that they grew stronger with every tribulation that they faced, and the Nazis will find out that we German Bolsheviks are made of equally stern stuff. For each man killed by the terror, there will be ten men ready to take his place. Am I right, Soennecke?'

Soennecke felt that everyone was looking at him, and he knew that Josmar, Vasso and perhaps Doino as well were speculating as to what he would reply. He said:

'The discipline of the Party leaves nothing to be desired. We don't lack men ready to make any sacrifice. It's no exaggeration to say that in many places we are stronger than we have ever been before. Bärtchen is right.'

Since they were seated in a circle and Hanusia was hidden behind Edi's broad back, her presence had been scarcely noticed. As she now began to speak they turned to look at her, curious to see the mouth from which such harsh words could come in such a soft and serious tone:

'The weapons of the enemy are not half as murderous as the lies spoken by the leaders of their victims. The enemies' songs of hate have a better sound than the phrases that dribble like saliva from the mouths of the professional mourners standing around the grave. It takes twenty years for a baby to become a man, but the chiefs of the betrayed

revolution can conjure up ten men immediately to replace the one whose life they were incapable of saving. "The discipline leaves nothing to be desired." When a man suffers for his convictions, he strengthens them and at the same time they strengthen him. But when a man suffers simply because he's been well disciplined, it's as unconvincing as the ten million soldiers who died in the war - and who convinced nobody of anything. What a dreadful way you people talk!"

There were strong, even indignant, protests against those words. Yet Stetten, who had quickly jumped up and was standing next to Hanusia as though to protect her from physical violence, managed to calm them down and re-establish at least the semblance of good feeling.

'How well we know what you feel, all of us!' he began. 'Which of us hasn't been disgusted by the mere sound of words at some time or another? Sometimes I dream of nothing but words, and that makes for a most unpleasant sort of half-sleep. No scene in a nightmare could ever be as unpleasant as they are. If an action is silent, once its consequences have been got over nothing but words are left. Most of the great heroes were boastful windbags: it was only illiteracy, or premature death that prevented them from displaying themselves to posterity in adequate length and detail. Don't, my child, lose patience with us. If your heart bleeds for the victims, then let it bleed for us too, for we may be numbered among them tomorrow. And, my young friend, Faber here, has just come from a year in the best organised of hells. Let's listen quietly to what he has to say. Do you agree?'

She made no reply. Doino silently offered her a chair next to his own. She moved across and sat down beside him.

'You taught me, my dear professor,' Doino said to Stetten in a loud voice, 'to be on my guard against the fetishism of facts. He who places himself above facts finds that they come to him of their own accord; he who reaches after them finds that the most insignificant ones have the trick of assuming the dimensions of mountains. So I won't give you any facts, or at least only such as come to me of their own accord.'

'It was still springtime, and never had there been a more beautiful one. The sun never reached through the high-up window in my cell, but the little square of heaven that I could see was like blue velvet. The sight of it filled me with a sensation of tenderness which, more even than my hopes for the future, linked me to life. Then the interrogations by night began. They usually ended with having to run up and down-stairs, from the basement up the fourth floor, down again, up again, down again. There were men standing on the landings and they lashed at you with their leather belts or with dog-whips. The tireder you got

the harder they hit, and the faster you had to run. They'd strike you full in the face and chase you down the stairs with blows on the back of the neck. One night this business had been going on for so long that even they began to grow tired. Then they made me carry a pile of mess tins, one heap on each arm, so many I could hardly see over the top. Over and over again I would drop one as I came panting up the stairs, and it would roll down. I would have to go back and pick it up. And that was their opportunity to have some fun: while I was bending down to pick up the mess tin they hit me on the arms, so that I'd drop other ones which would roll further down the stairs. It was a fine game, and they'd willingly have gone on playing it all night. And then, for the first time, something happened to me: I left my humiliated body, I became as it were divorced from my poor heart, trying so hard to do its work with short, quick beats – I managed to estrange myself from that moment of time, I was far away – nowhere. I only found myself again when I was back in my cell. No, it's like love, you can't invent anything really new in the technique of torture. The bloody befouled body, the broken bones – all that remains without will in the hands of the torturers, but the tortured man has meanwhile cut himself off from their present. For his technique has not changed either. His dignity becomes unassailable at that moment when the hope of death makes the pain bearable because it promises soon to put an end to it. During one of those nights, during such a moment of self-estrangement, I saw through the window on the stairs the first pink glimmerings of the coming dawn. I ran to the window and broke the panes with my bare fists, as though I had to reach nearer to the sky, the light, the new day. Only when they had struck me down on the floor and were trampling on my face with their boots, only then did I allow myself to become unconscious. When I awoke – they had taken me back to my cell and thrown me down against the wall under the window – I saw the heavens through the bars above me. And I wept for tenderness and for relief that a sky existed.

'Is that the essence or the deeper meaning Bärtchen was looking for?
‘Or is it this?

'You know that later I was put in the camp where they tortured the poet to death.

'We all had to watch while they put this man to the agony. They made us, about four hundred men, stand by' – there were five guards, armed it is true, and, of course, there were more of them up on the watch-towers, but all the same there were four hundred of us. Before our eyes, sometimes surrounded by us – for they would make us form

up in a hollow square - they played their horrible game with the poet whose songs we had all once sung, whose noble features we had all known well before they had smashed them. There we stood, four hundred men, of whom some three hundred were communists, at attention as we had been ordered, and we were the obedient spectators, the witnesses of what happened - we who should have been the avenging rebels. Of what is that the essence, what deeper meaning does that convey?

'They had broken all the poet's teeth, they had taken away his spectacles so that he was almost blind, they had pulled out his hair and on his skull had branded the sign beneath which they had conquered; they had starved him and forced him to eat salt soup and then allowed him nothing to drink. They wanted him to say: "I am a Jewish swine. Everything I have written is filth." They reduced him to the point where he would say - with a smile that even in his broken face seemed noble and deliberate - "I am a Jewish swine," but he would not deny his poems.

'Autumn came, a wet, cold autumn. They invented a half-open standing coffin and put him in it. There we would see him, almost naked, starving, his face unrecognisable from their blows, as we marched past, singing to order, on our way to work. Once he waved to us with his hand and said something: his weak voice was drowned by our loud singing. When we came back we could no longer see his hands, for they had been tied behind him.

'On another occasion, when we were coming back from work, the guard had forgotten to order us to sing, and as we went by he cried out to us: "Don't believe in my suicide. I'll never . . ." The guard struck him down before he could say any more. Two days later we were taken by his standing coffin: his face was now totally unrecognisable. The guards shouted: "Look, the swine's hanged himself at last!" We knew they were lying. We knew, too, that we had done nothing to shorten his agony by even one minute. We were the witnesses and we had not borne witness.'

'The witness and the historian - they speak later. They are influenced by the event, and they influence the verdict,' said Stetten.

'There are too many witnesses in the world, far too many, which is why the murderers and the traitors are enthroned on the tombs of their victims,' said Hanusia sadly.

Bärtchen corrected her:

'Those are just ready-made platitudes. The communists in the camp couldn't have saved the poet. They might have seized control of the

camp for five minutes before they were all liquidated. We don't accept a policy of escapades either in big matters or in small ones. As a matter of fact, the poet was a petit-bourgeois anarchist with certain social ideas, a permanent rebel. It is quite possible that in certain circumstances a Soviet Germany might have been compelled to liquidate him. I admit it quite frankly. What's your opinion, Soennecke?

'Well, yes,' Soennecke replied. 'Of course that's something else again. The mutiny on the cruiser *Potemkin*, that was another escapade, in that sense, all the same. . . .'

Edi interrupted him:

'And what's just happened in Austria, I suppose that's an adventure too? It's true you communists didn't take much part in it, but all the same you can hardly deny . . .'

He was interrupted in his turn and the argument became general and noisy.

At last Stetten managed to make himself heard, and they all fell silent. He was in good form. The fact that he took nothing entirely seriously might have been annoying, but it was forgivable since he didn't apparently expect to be taken entirely seriously himself. He finished by saying:

'Let's agree, then, that any attempt to urge history on its way is an adventure. No one can deny that courageous adventurers are more attractive than cowards. But where courage sees only one motive for action, cowardice can find ten times ten thousand for inaction. Which is why there are so many spectators. All the motives save one belong to them. The courageous man is brave because he fears death less than he does self-contempt. Yet who can assert that fear of one's own opinion, which is the source of bravery, is not even more contemptible despite all the arrogance that goes with it. And is it not the survivor who is proved right in the long run? My friends, it's almost always the spectators - the witnesses - who survive.'

'I find it magnificent,' said Eli thoughtfully, 'that the poet should have refused to the bitter end to vilify his own work, even though he knew that by so doing he was simply enflashing the hatred of his torturers.'

Karel, who had sat silent all evening, now spoke:

'It was just stupidity on his part. He was exactly what Bärtchen just said, a petit-bourgeois sentimental anarchist. What political significance could it possibly have had if he had given it and repeated their silly sentence about his poems being filth? The revolutionary thinks only of the end: the means don't matter to him. That apart, why should he have cared what a few Nazis thought about him and his work?'

There were a number of contradictory opinions about this too. Yet the longer the conversation went on, the more problematical the figure of the poet became. Karel and Bärtchen dealt with him all over again, liquidated him once more. Even those who spoke up for him eventually fell silent. The future would decide they said, closing the conversation, whether he or they were right.

'All, or almost all, the men in this camp,' Doino began again, 'had passed through appalling interrogations and had stood up to them. One or two had perhaps been bent, but none had been broken. Only when we arrived at this camp did something happen to us that really turned us into prisoners. We accepted the camp discipline. That had a deep effect on each one of us. Politically we hadn't given in, but as human beings we were now on the side of our guards. Our natural tendency to obey made us accept their words of command. Our life was ordered down to the minutest detail. As soon as we agreed to this state of affairs we became doubly prisoners. Inside each one of us there sat the warder, the enemy.'

'Only at night, walking or dreaming, could we try to achieve freedom once again, to win back for our own free will the lost ground that by day we surrendered so willingly, and, what is worse, so automatically. By day the present might be all-powerful, a time without beginning or end; by night we tried to bury the present, to deny the awful power it had over us all.'

'Thus we sank into a premature dotage, and only the past had any reality for us. Like a blind man, each of us fumbled about in his past, tasting again the drink he had once drunk, once again embracing a woman for the first time, once again reading his first book. In his dreams he heard the voices of his friends, in his dreams he slept in a proper bed, in his dreams he walked through a field white with narcissi.'

'It didn't take long to realise just how dangerous this daytime life of absolute submission to the present was, and how hopelessly paralysing the night-time search for consolation in the past must become.'

'At that time – it was shortly after the murder of the poet – I worked out a plan of escape. I had previously attempted, by means of our very spasmodic contacts with the outside world, to get the Party's approval for such an undertaking, but I never received any answer to my request.'

Soennecke interjected:

'I only ever once had news of you. You asked approval and help for a mass escape. I preferred not to let you know that the undertaking

seemed to be on too large a scale. The chances of your being able to get away, even once you were out of the camp, were slight. We would have had to stop all our other work and use the entire apparatus for this single job. That was clearly quite out of the question. Not to mention the fact that only one single camp would have been involved. They would have exacted reprisals on the other camps if your plan had worked, and the result would have been a massacre. You do see my point, don't you, Doino?"

"I don't see it yet, Herbert, but just give me two or three more weeks' freedom and maybe I'll forget those things only a prisoner knows – and that a man who's not been in jail can never, never understand."

There ensued a sharp argument in which Soennecke and Josmar also took part, during which Bärtchen threatened to leave the party, but, after a while, they all calmed down. Karel took some trouble to improve the general atmosphere, and in order to give Bärtchen a better opinion of Doino he told a few anecdotes about the illegal work that he and Doino had done together.

"Only later did the fellow tell me how Doino had set about winning him over for the movement. Me, for example, I'd have promised him a job as Director of the National Bank of our future Soviet Republic, or People's Commissar for Finance, or ambassador in Paris, that sort of thing works incredibly well with the middle classes – but not Doino; he hardly so much as mentioned politics to him, at least not to start with, but what he told the chap was something like this: "There are three sorts of men. Let's imagine that it's a matter of being in love with a woman, and let's assume she's nothing more than a pretty girl with red hair. For the sake of the argument let us say that our three men are all extremely fond of redheads. The first one, in order to be able to love the girl, has to persuade himself that she's clever, charming, has a fine character, and so on and so forth. So long as he desires her he'll never even realise that she's boring, incapable of discussing anything except her friends, and always uses the clichés that appeal to all half-educated novel readers. The girl will only make him unhappy when he stops loving her. The second man, though he realises what a worthless creature she is, loves her all the same, and this makes him unhappy. He is her victim; he lets himself be governed by her stupidity, and he's always trying to persuade himself that he's improving her, that, given a little patience, he can bring her up to his level. The third man realises that what he likes is red hair, that the woman is worthless, that he can never make her anything other than what she is. Her personality means nothing to him but her skin – the wonderful white skin of redheads –

that he adores. And he knows that nothing else matters, that the only thing that counts with him is the pleasure of sleeping with this particular woman. This third sort of man is the only sort I can talk to seriously,” Doino added. Naturally enough our chap asked: “Which sort would you say I was?” and Doino answered with all seriousness, “I’m not quite sure, but since I like you I hope the third sort.” And with what one might call psychological nonsense of that sort, Doino persuaded this bourgeois to do illegal work for us at a particularly dangerous time. Isn’t it superb?”

‘No, it’s not superb,’ Edi said. ‘It’s simple. Doino, of course, hadn’t won him over by his frightful parable about the redhead. Rather he offered him membership of an élite, of a new sort of aristocracy. Cruder revolutionary agents offer what they themselves desire: the highest jobs in the new bureaucracy. A man like Doino, being somewhat more sensitive, reaches the same end in a roundabout way, offering to the desiccated, miserly soul the comforts of a philosophy that encourages exhibitionism and of a friendship that permits of no illusions other than those on which it is based.’

‘What do you think yourself, Doino?’ Mara asked.

‘I think that it can all be explained in one simple generalisation: never before have so many people shown such an unlimited readiness to sacrifice themselves.’

‘You’re wrong there. It’s happened before. Though not all the time,’ Stetten interposed.

‘Perhaps. But never before have people longed so for some sensible reason for sacrificing themselves.’

‘Yes, since they are far more willing to make sacrifices than they are capable of using powers of discrimination, they’ll accept the most absurd reasons and will start off by sacrificing the tiny bit of sense that they do possess. There’s nothing for which men of that type wouldn’t be willing to die,’ Edi said.

‘You’re in a sour mood today, Edi. While we’re on the subject, what moved you to abandon your common-sense attitude towards these matters? What tricks were played on your not very miserly soul? Why did you fight?’ Doino asked.

‘Why? Because I found it unbearable to contemplate a nation watching with equanimity while its foremost elements bled to death; because I had no desire to be one of those contemptible spectators; because I thought about people I loved and who I knew were fighting. I couldn’t bear to sit and listen to the radio while they were being gradually massacred.’

'So your sensible reason was wounded pride?' Vasso asked.

'Or endangered dignity,' Stetten put in. 'It's no more reasonable, but it sounds better.'

'I went there to look after the wounded and to urge my friends to run away, to have nothing more to do with what they call the *avant-garde* spirit. I was well aware that I was taking part in a pointless struggle. Do I belong to the third sort of men, the sort you can talk to seriously, Doino?'

Stetten interrupted again:

'You belong, my dear Dr Rubin, to an old and clever people. The really intelligent peoples never allow themselves to become involved in a fight until that fight is 'one of despair and pointless. The Carthaginians were so witty at the expense of Hannibal and his war that the grapes fell out of their mouths for laughing and the wine-jugs trembled in the hands of their slaves. But when it was too late they fought like lions, or like your Maccabees. Only stupid, bellicose peoples believe after one battle that they've won a victory. Or, to be blunt, only idiots believe in victory.'

'Is the world full of idiots, then?' Josmar asked, hesitantly.

'Full of semi-idiots, yes. But please don't quote me - in any case, nobody will believe you. The defeated must have faith in victory, the way the ugly must believe in beauty. The conquerors, on the other hand, are the *cocus de la victoire* and cuckolds are always blind.'

'A dangerous theory, professor, but a most intriguing one,' remarked Bärtchen.

'No theory is dangerous in itself, but any theory becomes dangerous to the man who debases himself by elevating the theory to dogma,' Stetten said.

'Practically applied,' Soennecke said, 'your theory would mean that in Germany, for instance, we should sit with our hands in our pockets and let the Nazis do as they pleased; we should let them start their war; we should give in. What you're proposing is the Christian theory of showing the other cheek.'

'You're equally wrong on two counts; firstly, as to the nature of my theory; and, secondly, about your own ability to impede the Nazis in any way whatever. And you strike me as a man who perhaps knows that he's wrong. You, too, belong to type three.'

Soennecke answered calmly:

'The little I know about historians shows that they have always been shockingly bad politicians. For our part we may often make mistakes, but at least we do everything in our power to realise our favourable

prognostications. If we fail, then it is the prognostications that must be examined afresh, not our efforts. We'll do everything we can to make it impossible for Hitler to make war. If we don't succeed, at least the survivors of the war will remember what we did. Our policies are only right in the short run if they are also right in the long run. And only a man who thinks dialectically can take the long view. •

A long discussion followed, lasting until after midnight. The circle broke up into small groups. Many who had kept silent up till then, now found the last, final words to put an end to the argument. Someone told the latest jokes intended to show how ridiculous were the new rulers of Germany. Stetten and Doino knew that these jokes were thousands of years old. When a régime of terror is young, such jokes are still funny. Later on only the exiles, far from danger, can retain a taste for such witticisms; such is their miserable revenge. •

They heard Karel repeating excitedly, over and over again:

'It's preposterous. Grown-up men who don't even know the proper way of opening a sardine tin - and they want to lead a Party. It's preposterous.'

'Is that man drunk?' Stetten asked.

'No, not a bit,' Doino replied. 'He's drunk a great deal, and if he drank as much again he might not know what he was talking about, but he'd still be well aware of what the others were saying, and what's more he'd be able to remember it at an opportune moment.'

'What's all this stuff about sardine tins, then?'

'That's directed against my friend and his compatriot, Vasso. Karel found him trying to open a tin the wrong way. And needless to say Karel's an expert on opening tins, or anything else for that matter; he knows a great deal about keys of all sorts.'

'Interesting,' Stetten said. 'But I can't make up my mind which is the more instructive: to see your comrades-in-arms opening tins of food, or to observe them when they no longer know what they themselves are talking about but are well aware of what the others are saying.'

He walked over to the little group which consisted of Karel, Bärtchen and Josmar.

Bärtchen was saying:

'What Faber said, I mean about breaking the window - most remarkable! It had a literary sound to me, a bit too polished. I wonder whether, in fact, he wasn't simply trying to commit suicide. What are your views, Karel? He's a friend of yours, I understand.'

'Suicide!' His speech was thick and the word came out *soosi*.

'Suicide is a serious deviation from the Party line. No one knows for sure whether it's a rightist one or a leftist one. And if Doino's now planning to sleep with that woman there, that counter-revolutionary, she was expelled from the Russian Party along with her husband, what sort of a deviation would that be? To the Left? To the Right? In the Centre? In the Centre, eh? A deviation to the Centre! That's a good one!'

'It's no joking matter. Faber should be warned against her,' Bärtchen said earnestly.

Stetten gave the signal for the party to break up. Edi and Josmar went with him. The others followed soon after. Hanusia remained behind.

2

'Should I ask you why you stayed, Hanusia?'

'No.'

'Should I tell you I'm glad you did?'

'Yes, but you must say it often and in lots of different ways, so that I'll believe you.'

'And will you believe me?'

'No, not a word. You'll kiss me and my eyes will stay open. I'll be thinking: for the first time in many, many months the ex-prisoner is kissing a woman. By chance she fell into his arms. He doesn't ask why she stays there.'

'I ask . . .'

'No, you don't ask. A clever man, who has been much loved, doesn't willingly ask questions, because he's afraid of being tied by the woman's answers. And the cleverest woman would have to be feather-brained when with him, because he'd be so afraid of her talking to him seriously.'

'How do you know that?'

'By living thirty years and only ever loving one man. I've learned everything that a woman forgets when she loves many men. I don't love you. I don't know, but perhaps my mouth will close when you kiss it. I don't know if I shall desire you. I long to be desired by somebody whom I recognised, from among thousands, as the man I want to desire myself.'

'I'm here, beside you.'

'But you don't put your arms around me.'

'I kiss your eyes, Hanusia.'

‘Yes, you make your choice little by little. You like my eyes. Perhaps you’ll like my arms, too, and other things about me. And I shall only be a spectator.’ “

‘Shouldn’t you go home?’

‘No. I’m waiting for you to tell me that without even knowing me you’ve always longed for me, that you thought of me when you were lying in other women’s arms, that you dreamed of me in the camp.’

‘I shan’t tell you that. The woman a prisoner longs for is the woman he loves – I love no one. Otherwise she is as featureless as the women of negro statues.’

‘What a pity I’ve never seen one. I can’t tell if I look like them.’

‘You don’t look like them. During the past year I often thought that I would never again have the courage to come near a woman, to show myself to her naked. It was as though my lacerated skin would never grow new again, and my body always be covered with blue marks, as though the trace of their boots and the stain of their spittle would be with me for ever. Now you are here, and your sadness is more discouraging than all the signs of my maltreatment.’

‘You should stop me talking, Doino. Don’t you notice how old and stale everything I say is? I’ve rehearsed it to myself so often, imagining the occasion on which I would say it to a man. Now you are here, and the words have lost their meaning. I want to be happy and I don’t know how it’s done. I don’t know if you know. Tell me you love me, and I’ll try to believe you, and that way I’ll forget that I loved before. Don’t let me go back to my old life, Doino, don’t let me go! Kiss me, I’m so unhappy.’

The next morning there was new snow, and it lay white and fresh on the quays beside the river as Doino walked through the streets of a city – for the first time without the fear of a chance encounter or of being followed. Hanusja was by his side.

He kept stopping. Everything touched him. Things he had long known now seemed to him marvellously contrived, brilliantly arranged. Only when he has become certain of his new environment, when his feet have almost suspiciously tested their freedom of movement, is the man from prison really assured of his freedom. Only when what he has remembered becomes factually, tangibly present, is he freed from the bondage of those memories. Since he has not lived among them, everything, the most commonplace objects, becomes new and

incomparable. It is the commonplace that he looks for, which is for him a unique, eternally happy adventure.

'What a lot I've promised you in the last few hours, Hanusia!'

'You won't keep your promises, Doino. You've already forgotten what they were.'

'I've forgotten nothing. Just give me time.'

'I'll give it you, but you won't take it. If I didn't feel your arm in mine I would have to keep looking round to make sure you were still beside me.'

'Don't you hear me talking?'

'No, because you're not talking to me. As we came out on to the street, you were thinking: "I'll get into trouble with the Party on account of Hanusia." Why didn't you say it to me?'

'I thought I'd overcome that trouble.'

'No. You thought: "Of course if it can't be arranged any other way, if Hanusia won't compromise and won't even ask to be readmitted to the Party with a plea for forgiveness and so on, then I suppose I'll have to give in. I've done it so often before; I've sacrificed so many of my friends for the cause." You already saw me as one of that pathetic flock of yours, Doino, you pelican who feeds his offspring with his own heart's blood.'

'And the offspring say: "How sick we are of heart's blood, it's all we get every day."

'I'm not your offspring.'

'What a lot I've promised you already, Hanusia!'

'I've forgotten already. He who listens to the false promises of his enemies forgets their real threats.'

'I'm not your enemy, I'm...'

'Let it pass, Doino. What one forgets in an embrace is not really forgotten. Hans hated the Party, but never as bitterly as I do, and that was why he could fight against it. I hate it – it's the biggest, ugliest and most poisonous swindle. I know the truth, I've lived it, and I've seen how in Russia, before our eyes, it became its own opposite. They kept the flags and turned them into a shroud for the corpse of murdered truth. They twisted the meaning of words inside out, yet they went on using the words, so that those who kept the true meaning alive within themselves had no choice but to fall silent. You're so clever that it seems likely that you'll waste yourself in attempting to perform the *tour de force* of making one life into several. You're so clever that you can be as trusting as a child, since you're certain that deception will fade away before your eyes without any effort on your part. And you,

you don't see the truth? Why do you want to fool yourself? I can hate the others because they are my enemies; if I weren't so sick with bitterness I might even be able to pity them, but you . . .

'That's enough, Hanusia. You don't see things as they really are. You're full of bitterness - you admit it yourself. What has an embittered person ever been able to judge perfectly?'

'The source of his bitterness, and that's enough.'

'No, it's not enough. For millions of men it is the source of their greatest hope. And even if I'm wrong, even if we're all wrong, thanks to our mistake that hope will be realised. Whatever criticism may be made of the revolution in Russia, wherever in the world there is a revolutionary who thinks, he thinks in the light of the Russian revolution and not in its shade, which, to you, is its only reality.'

'I know the truth.'

'No single person ever knows the whole truth. It goes bad in solitude, and becomes a travesty of itself. Is a piece of coloured bunting an idea, a truth? Give it a name and under that flag men will storm fortresses, will seize cannons with their bare fists, though in every text-book it is clearly stated that such actions are impossible. You believe that a man who stands by the Soviet Union must be either a fool or a knave. But we know, we know exactly what's happened over there, and we'll save it because we believe in it, because we'll hide its decadence with lies - but with lies that will be lies no longer, once we have triumphed.'

'But you won't triumph, simply on account of your lies. You'll have to be continually inventing new ones, bigger ones, until what's left of your stock of truth has been devoured by them. And then when the stupidest and most dishonest men among you, when even they understand that you've lost, then what will you have left - what truth, what thoughts, what courage?'

'When you talk like an intelligent little girl who's thought things out and learned her speech by heart, I like listening to you. I enjoy the sound of your voice. I love your eyes when they are sparkling with the brightness of truth. But, when you argue, I don't like it. I seem to hear a dead man's voice, and I feel his pride appealing to mine. I won't fight against him - whoever got the better of a dead man? Let it be, Hanusia. Have a little faith in me and my friends. Watch what we're doing. Try and be a little happy for once. You live only in your hatreds. You have no real enemy who can't be overcome. You hate the Party. You hate me. The Party will live. I shall live. But what will happen to you? The hated one has for enemies, one can get rid of that as soon as one has

got rid of the people who inspired it; but the hatred one has for one's friends, that's suicidal.'

'I have no friends, nor have I any enemies. Not even the dead man, whose pride you would break; if he were still alive not even he would belong to me. I have only memories. They aren't pretty, but I live among them because they are mine. You were talking just now and I scarcely heard what you were saying. Your voice came to me as through a wall of memories. It didn't sound convincing, your voice; it sounded worn out, as though it had convinced too many people before me. I want to start afresh. Is it possible to do that with you?'

'Try. It may be.'

'I'll try. The dead man's voice says: "It won't work." For years it has said just that. Only when I believe in you will I hear that voice no longer.'

4

Soennecke remained for another three weeks in Prague. It was intended that he should go to Moscow for definitive conversations with the men who could really decide, and should only return to Germany after that. However, other instructions arrived from Russia. He went back by way of Paris and Denmark. Irma accompanied him to Paris, where they separated. Soennecke knew that she didn't love him; he hoped that if they met again he would be indifferent towards her. He tried to find extenuating explanations for her ambiguous behaviour, for what Josmar called her disloyalty and her bourgeois love of sensationalism.

Josmar stayed for a while near the frontier. He had business to discuss with the men responsible for the border posts. If the new organisation worked well, the contacts between the émigrés and the homeland would be more efficient. Then he, too, went back. He was again fully in agreement with everyone, both the leaders abroad and Soennecke.

After some time Vasso and Mara returned to Vienna. By means of very delicate enquiries, Karel had established that they were not compromised there. So they could continue their work in Austria. They had seen a lot of Doino. Mara had accepted Hanusia, and the two women had grown fond of one another.

When they said goodbye they tried to think when and where they would meet again. It had not yet been fixed what Doino was going to do. Vasso said:

'Even if Karel manages to liquidate us, Doino, you'll still be alive. You'll withdraw with old Stetten to some well-protected observation

post. The two of you will work out the formula that best explains both the senselessness of our destruction and the historical significance of our work. Stetten will prove to you that he was right all along, and with a slightly tragic conceit you will congratulate yourself on the fact that your love for us has in no way affected the objectivity of your attitude. And on the other side you will succeed in proving to Bärtchen – who by then will have replaced Soennecke – that you could prove to him that he's a fool, but at the same time you'll admit to him that his victory over Soennecke has historical significance. And you'll envy us the fact that we were spared having to live to witness the triumph of Karel and of Bärtchen.'

'You're being unfair,' answered Doino, as though it were all a joke. 'You've left out the bit about my wearing mourning for you.'

'Karel won't allow you to. If you disobey him, then he'll liquidate you too. So you won't wear mourning.'

'I shall, though. And Karel won't kill me, or if he does it'll be by a stab in the back. But I won't give him the opportunity, since I shall keep looking him straight in the face.'

'You won't be able to do that. He will have grown too big. You'll see huge pictures of him hanging in public squares all over the world. Men will be coming in crowds to bow down before him, speaking his name with love and respect.'

'What a curious thing to say, Vasso. We're wasting time joking, and you give our jokes a tragic undertone. Why? What are you getting at?'

'I can hear the grass growing and I can see the Karels trampling it down. You don't see the one because you won't listen to the other.'

'We'll laugh about all this – in two or three years the bogey will have been laid.'

'In two or three years, Doino, the best joke in the world won't make you even smile. *Zivio!*'

By means of tactful questions in high places, Edi had learned that he could go back to Austria without danger and resume his work at the university. For a time he was undecided, but his antipathy to such a return, to an acceptance of such an 'Austrian destiny', was really too great. Relly stayed on for a few weeks in Vienna and arranged the details of their departure. They met again in Paris, and from there they planned to go to America, where Edi had been offered facilities for continuing his scientific work. Yet they kept postponing the date of their departure, of their abandonment of Europe. It seemed to their friends as though Edi were unable to pick up once again the thread of

his former life – and it had, after all, been a remarkably firm thread – and was wandering about in a strangely dazed state, attempting to find a new thread that either didn't exist or was, for him, valueless.

In Prague he saw a lot of Hanusia. At first he was afraid that living with Doino would change her, that she would give way and adapt herself to him. It was soon made plain to him that such fears were groundless. Her self-confidence remained untouched. Edi said to himself with relief: 'A woman who in no way alters her tone of voice or her gestures, even when she feels she is being admired, will stand up to all the seductions and all the tricks.' And it became easy for him to overcome the hardly admissible sensation of jealousy that he had experienced so painfully in the days that followed Doino's party.

Stetten only stayed on a little time in Prague, before going back to Vienna to prepare for his trip to Russia. Doino had insisted that he go there at once and form his own opinion, on the spot, about the problem concerning which they talked so much. Stetten went there to make a decision which might be of capital importance to him for the rest of his life. He was still searching for the answer that he owed the prelate, and that perhaps he also owed to his own past. He was ready to take any risks so long as he saw some sense in them. No adventure was too bold for him, no escapade too energetic, so long as two conditions were fulfilled; that no violence was done to his thoughts, and that he was assured of Doino's company later on.

Thanks to the help he received from Stetten – which was offered in such a way as to make refusal impossible – Doino was enabled to spend a few carefree months travelling with Hanusia while he recovered his health.

They passed a few weeks in the mountains. When winter was over they went south, to the sea. They lived on an island: Doino maintained that it was more difficult to be unhappy there than it was to be happy anywhere else.

They didn't stay there as long as they had planned. Doino was entrusted by the Party with a mission that could not be postponed.

They meant to spend three more days in the little port opposite the island. But on the second day, early in the morning, Hanusia left. Doino read her brief farewell note with amazement. She thanked him for everything, she was going away, and she wouldn't say where to. She'd write to him one day, but not for a few years.

Doino spent the day wandering sadly around the town. He didn't

disguise from himself his sensation of being set free. It was weaker than his sorrow, but as the days went by it would grow stronger. As a young man, each separation from a woman had seemed to him to be a sort of death. He wasn't a boy any more. One gets used to deaths of that sort, since one survives them. Everything that one used to resent about the departed woman, in the days when one still loved her, is soon forgotten. What remains becomes gradually faded, pale and colourless, memories that no longer have any effect. The feeling of meeting a ghost, that a man experiences when he runs across a woman out of his past, soon disappears, for eventually he realises that he is a ghost himself. There is room for that, too, in the daily round. To begin with, Doino tried to find out where Hanusia might have gone. He didn't do it with any great determination, and after a while he abandoned the attempt.

He was assigned the mission of showing the world, through statements of fact and convincing expressions of opinion, that the horrors being perpetrated in Germany were the concern of everybody alive in the world, since, unless something were done about it, they would result in a world war. The most remote agricultural labourer in Canada had to be persuaded that what had begun as the persecution of Jews and Communists, the burning of books and the use of torture in the prisons, was part of the preparation for war and would lead to his having to come and fight on the battlefields of Europe.

When his fellow workers tended to despair of the deafness of the world, Doino, Stetten's pupil, would console them.

'The world is still very young. It hasn't really learned how to listen yet. It can recall yesterday's events, but cannot remember those of last week. The corpses of the next war are even now sitting on the benches in the schools. Nothing that they are being taught will enable them to escape their fate. And their parents won't believe us.'

'What is the use of preaching to deaf ears?' one man asked.

'This. When they are truly deafened by the crash of bombs and shells they'll be eager to listen to what we shall then whisper in their ears.'

'But it'll be too late by then.'

'Too late? I remember the last war, and I'm afraid it might still be too early. Revolutionaries almost always come before their time. The world, my friends, is still dreadfully young; which is why people like us become prematurely old.'

CHAPTER VIII

I

'Out with it, and no beating about the bush! What have you got against me?' Störte wanted to know.

No, Soennecke didn't care for Störte. In appearance he was as solid as an oak, but Soennecke had learned accidentally that in fact he was sick. He had infected young girls, members of the Party, and was himself too much of a coward to undergo a radical course of treatment. Soennecke's knowledge of venereal disease was derived from cheap hygiene leaflets which he had read as a child and from garishly-coloured posters that had filled him with a lasting disgust. He belonged to the generation of the virtuous revolutionaries; they didn't get drunk because alcohol was an enemy of the working class, and they avoided the sins that bourgeois morals condemned, but avoided them for reasons which only applied to revolutionaries.

Störte sinned frivolously, which was one thing Soennecke held against him. Yet even in his thoughts he never used the word 'sin' since it had no place in his morality. Syphilitics disgusted him, he disliked homosexuals, and drunkards he pitied and despised. He shook hands with such men reluctantly: when, as sometimes happened, he had to accept their comradeship, he did so unwillingly. And when he remembered Classen, whom the enemy had caught at the very beginning, he consoled himself with the thought that Classen would behave well in captivity, since he would get nothing to drink. For almost a year Soennecke had been working on a plan to set that particularly well-guarded prisoner free, a plan compounded of cunning, bribery, and the use of force. He had succeeded in establishing contact with Classen and in passing him items that would make his imprisonment a little more tolerable: alcohol was not among them.

Störte had risen in the Party with the backing of Classen and of Classen's friends. Two years in the docks, four in small freighters which had taken him to many ports but never inland, one year out of work after a strike which he had very cleverly organised, four months' work with the Seamen's Union - such was Störte's past when he applied to join the Party. He proved himself to be a powerful speaker, who

effectively spiced his rough seaman's talk with educated turns of phrase. He seemed to be a fearless fellow, always pleased when he had provoked the enemy to violence because it gave him an opportunity to show how easily he could get the better of them. To start with he took every opportunity of explaining that he was no theorist, that his class-consciousness was all he needed to show him the right course, that he'd knocked about the world and knew what was what, that the enemy was always the same wherever you went, and that he, Störte, had always given him as good as he got. Later on, however, he took to interlarding his remarks with quotations, producing statistical proofs, and employing in the most learned fashion, phrases such as 'historic materialism', 'dialectical development', and the 'expropriation of the expropriators'.

The young men he led in the battles at the political meetings and the skirmishes in the suburbs followed him devotedly. He was their hero.

Nowhere else had the party organisation been so frightfully, so murderously, smashed as in Störte's district. Yet nowhere else had it been so successfully revived. This was the district that gave the lie to Soennecke's defeatism. The number of members grew, the communications worked without a hitch. Propaganda was handed out in the dock area, almost under the noses of the police, and was distributed without apparent difficulty. If it could be done there, why not elsewhere? Boldness, strict adherence to the Party line, uncompromising discipline and the proper conspiratorial methods properly applied – that was all there was to it.

Communications between Soennecke and Störte were not good. Out of five comrades sent into this district, four were caught in a matter of days or even hours, while the fifth only escaped his pursuers by a miracle. In his report to the Politburo, Störte had complained about this, alleging a failure of conspiratorial technique on Soennecke's part and adding that as a result he had been very frequently, and against his inclination, compelled to make decisions on his own initiative. The buro decided that Störte should receive his orders directly from them. He was considered as Soennecke's eventual successor, though the latter was to know nothing about this.

There were some things in politics that Soennecke knew instinctively. When subsequent events confirmed this knowledge, which he himself could not explain, he was invariably amazed. Every day he saw countless indications that showed him what people felt, yet he could not have explained how he knew what the stranger, silently reading his

paper in the tram, was thinking. It was only to his closest friends that he said he smelt something in the air. Yet, when he attempted to give the explanation of this feeling, he realised how slender it was.

For Bärtchen reality was determined by the Party line, in which he believed, or which, at any rate, he obeyed. Anything that didn't correspond with the Party didn't exist. For Soennecke, experience was what mattered, and the line could only be judged from that point of view. But he, too, submitted and obeyed.

In Störte's reports, which thoroughly justified the Party line, he saw something which struck him as untrue. He read: 'Since we are strong the Gestapo is weak in its action against us. Since they are weak we are able continually to diminish the dangers of our conspiratorial work. Which is why the Party grows steadily stronger despite being illegal.' That might be true. Soennecke felt sure that it was wrong, and that Störte hadn't written it. Why was the Gestapo so weak that the Party could grow strong? And why precisely there?

'What do you think, Josmar?' he asked.

'I don't know. Perhaps they have special conspiratorial methods up there.'

'Perhaps. But then why should Störte speak of them in such general terms? Why don't his reports give us any information about his methods? On January the fifteenth he organised a number of three-minute demonstrations. On each occasion the police arrived just too late, and not one of the men responsible for the demonstrations was caught. And that was right in the middle of the town, at the station, in the workers' quarters, and on the docks. Is it possible that not one of the men was recognised by anybody? Could that happen? Were they wearing masks? Where were the police and the S.A. and the Gestapo?'

'What are you getting at, Herbert? You never liked Störte. We've all grown distrustful. But we mustn't go too far.'

'I'm not distrustful. I just don't believe in miracles. Miracle-workers are frauds.'

'Always?'

'Always, Josmar. And apart from that, miracles are too expensive. A miracle may feed a man for one evening but he will hunger for the next three days. Come back day after tomorrow and perhaps by then I'll be able to tell you the secret of Störte's miracle.'

And in fact two days later Soennecke did know what the secret was, thanks to a miracle that he himself had been preparing for many years. It was an expensive one, too, but he didn't have to pay – that was done by a man whom he had chosen, and on whom he had inflicted a frightfully heavy burden.

Ever since his childhood Friedrich Wilhelm von Klönitz had been destined for a military career. The fact that his father was a professional officer was an example, but it was the wishes of his maternal grandfather that counted. This man had made money in the bakery trade, and had then married off both his daughters into aristocratic families, intending that his middle-class name should thus disappear and his grandsons be not as he was.

At home, at school, and later at the military academy, in fact everywhere he went, young von Klönitz was persuaded that the world had no finer honour to bestow on a man than that of making him an officer of the King of Prussia and Emperor of Germany. He was an industrious though not particularly distinguished student, and by nature amenable to discipline – everything about him was good, and he carried nothing to excess. He was proud of his Kaiser, his fatherland and his family, at least on the paternal side, of his school, his teachers, his horse and his cadet's uniform – all in that degree of moderation that was expected of him.

He was too young to be sent to the front when the war started. But the time would come when he, too, would partake of the victories. When the collapse happened it was as incredible to him as it was to his people. After a short period of nameless shock, he became certain that the German army had been betrayed and not defeated. The traitors at home had to be eliminated, and then everything would resume its normal course, and Germany, the only land of victories, would be victorious once more.

Von Klönitz joined a group of officers who intended to see to it that the country was 'put in proper order' once again. They set themselves up in one of the most elegant hotels in the town: they had weapons, money, and the certainty that no matter what they did they wouldn't be punished. Von Klönitz, eighteen years old at the time, knew nothing of the great political game that was going on behind the scenes. He joined them because it was a question of restoring the natural order of society, composed, as it should be, of the masses, the middle classes and the aristocracy – or privates, non-commissioned officers and officers.

He knew exactly what he was fighting for and why it was necessary to neutralise certain leaders of the so-called proletariat. He took part in some such actions, neither with any great enthusiasm nor with any particular misgivings.

Von Klönitz resumed his normal career; his future in the new army, the Reichswehr, seemed assured. After a speech by the Führer of the new political movement then struggling for power, he and some other officers formed a secret group, pledged to the dissemination of the leader's ideas within the army, in preparation for that ideal state of affairs which the Führer had called 'the nation in arms'.

Owing to carelessness the group became talked about, and the founders were tried for high treason. Their punishment was mild—from one to two years of fortress imprisonment. Here Klönitz and his friends got to know their enemies for the first time, and in an unexpected, personal way. These young officers had previously had a very exact idea of what a communist was like. Their amazement, when they discovered that this idea in no way corresponded with the reality, was so great that one or two of them began to nourish doubts about their other deeply cherished ideas. So it came about that they didn't regard it as entirely out of the question to talk to the communists, particularly to such of them as came from good or even, on occasion, noble families. It occurred to them that they might be officers, and even generals, in the great army of a proletarian nation. Three of the eight officers made an important decision, and towards the end of their sentence they published a statement, which they had not themselves written: in it they declared that they had resigned from the national socialist party and joined the communist movement, which alone sought to create national and social liberty.

Von Klönitz was not one of those three. He had often sat in on their discussions but had never opened his mouth. He didn't, as it happened, break off his personal relationships with the three who had changed sides, but he did disapprove of their lack of loyalty which, in some lights, might be regarded as treachery. The ideas of the communists seemed to him not only false, but also excessively involved and confused. He never managed to get all the way through one of their theoretical writings. They were boring. One book, though, he did read all the way through; he read it again, and a third time. But this was no Party tract. It was the letters that Rosa Luxemburg had written from prison.

It may have been the fact of his being himself in prison when he read them that made these letters have so profound and shattering an effect

on von Klönitz, who was normally such a placid, insensitive man. There was something else. He had often told his family and friends how sorry he was that on the very night of this woman's murder he should have missed what he called 'the fun'. For he had had that very clear picture of her which one can only have of a mythical enemy. And for him she had been the arch-enemy: small, crookedly built, a Jewess from Poland, a screaming orator, a Jewish hag, a witch - the arch-enemy.

For the first time in his life Klönitz found himself living in a confusion of emotions and ideas, and they affected him like an illness. He waited several days for it to pass, but in vain.

When he learned that Soennecke had been a close friend of hers, he asked for a day's leave of absence from the fortress. He had made no appointment with Soennecke, so he had to wait almost the whole day until the latter came home. He asked Soennecke to excuse him if he didn't introduce himself, addressing him with the proper respect and titles due to a member of the Reichstag. There was just one piece of information he wanted, or rather a personal description if he could so call it:

'What was Rosa Luxemburg really like, not as a politician, but as a human being, a person, a woman?'

Soennecke knew the names, and had memorised the photographs, of all the men who had participated in her murder - they were all still alive, a fact which he never forgot - and he was sure that this young man who now stood before him, with the posture and manners of a well-trained officer, was not one of them.

'I've talked to individuals privately by the hundred, and at meetings by the thousand, about Rosa Luxemburg. Why should it be so difficult for me to speak of her to you? Were you one of her murderers?'

'No!' von Klönitz quickly replied. And then, hesitantly: 'N-no . . .'

'But you could have been? In fact, you nearly were? Answer me!'

'Excuse me. I said no. For the moment I have nothing more to add, sir.'

There was a short silence before Soennecke spoke. He didn't address his words to the young man, sitting so stiffly opposite him, but to himself, half turning away towards the bookcase. The past rose up before him as he spoke, that past which was still the present for him, that still had the power to illuminate him. To this day the loss of that great woman had left him lonely, and it still gripped his heart. For the others she had been dead for twelve years; for him she had been dying for twelve years.

The stranger got up, clicked his heels, and said:

'I thank you very much, sir. On the occasion of my next visit I shall introduce myself properly.'

He clicked his heels again, bowed slightly, and was gone.

When von Klönitz came back four months later, having served out his sentence, he did in fact introduce himself, and also gave a brief account of his past life. Then he said, clicking his heels once again:

"Tell me what you wish me to do. I have already prepared fair copies of my request to be relieved of my commission and of my resignation from the national socialist party."

'Let me see them,' said Soennecke. He quickly read through the two papers and tore them up. He said:

'You will remain in the army and in the nazi party. You will do your best to secure rapid promotion in both of them. You can be of great use to us. You must never come to see me here again. We shall be in contact with one another, but no one, and I repeat no one, must ever know anything about this. Now listen carefully....'

Von Klönitz at first declined to do the work that Soennecke wanted him to do, since it was in contradiction to his whole character, but after a while he agreed. It is wrong to argue with one's superiors. His relations with Soennecke remained a carefully guarded secret. He was promoted in the army, and he held an important position in the nazi secret service, military section, even before the party was in power. When they'd taken over the government and had set up the secret state police, whose powers grew increasingly wider until there was almost no limit to them, von Klönitz, who had rapidly been promoted major, obtained a special appointment with the much-feared Gestapo; he became one of the most important liaison officers between the Gestapo and the army secret service.

Such was the man who performed Soennecke's miracles – not frequently, since Soennecke only turned to him in cases of extreme emergency. But this was an extreme case. Since Soennecke's return from abroad von Klönitz had been at work finding out what, if any, was the secret behind Störte's successes. Now he knew.

A few weeks after the nazis' seizure of power, an individual had been arrested. For two days he refused to speak, then in an unexpected moment of weakness, he talked. He gave a little information, of no great importance, before becoming silent once again. Back in his cell he tried to hang himself with his shirt, which he had torn up into strips. One of the interrogators realised what had happened inside their

prisoner. They, therefore, left him in peace for a time, treated him well, told him they didn't want anything more from him, since he'd talked and done right in betraying the Party. Then the man made a second suicide attempt by trying to bite through his arteries. Naturally it didn't work. What they did to him next, von Klönitz had not been able to discover. In any event the man was firmly persuaded that he was a traitor. Then they brought pressure to bear on him by threatening to spread the story of his treachery throughout the town. After four weeks they had reduced him to such a state that he was prepared to come to terms with the Gestapo; he would work for them on condition that they kept their promise not to make use of the information he gave them to arrest his comrades. An extremely odd arrangement.

So it was arranged that the man should escape, return to his comrades and lead an illegal existence. The escape was to take place while he was being transferred to another prison. He was pushed out of a slow-moving train, but he had bad luck and damaged both his knees slightly and one foot severely. A truck driver, another Gestapo man needless to say, found him and took him to a hospital in the town. He stayed there almost six weeks, and though he wasn't completely cured he was able to go home without crutches. While in hospital he had got in touch with his wife, and also — on the orders of the Gestapo — had renewed his contacts with Störte.

They kept the promise that they had made him. They did better than that: they did what they could to facilitate the rebuilding of the communist organisation in that district. The Gestapo were pursuing large and ambitious aims: the man — who used a false name, Born — was to work his way up in the Party hierarchy, and meanwhile his local organisation was to continue to expand until the leadership throughout the whole country was moved to there. Through Born they would thus have an entry into the central control; and also they would act in a similar way in all the other districts: the communist party would thus be controlled by the Gestapo! At a given moment the trap would be sprung and with one swoop the whole Party netted. Meanwhile men were being trained, principally Bavarians, Wurtemburgers, Silesians and Rhinelanders, who were to present themselves to the Party as comrades who had had to flee from their own homes, things having grown too hot for them there. Born was to get them admitted to the Party. They had to study communist literature thoroughly, the theory and history of the Party, besides learning the stereotyped phrases the communists used, and so on. Before they were sent out they had to pass another test. Some of them, before going off, had to

spend a few weeks as political prisoners in a concentration camp, where they underwent exactly the same treatment as the real communists.

Born knew nothing of these machinations. He had been gradually persuaded that within the Gestapo there were a number of people who were followers of Hitler because they believed him to be a true revolutionary, but who were determined to act seriously and join the communists should Hitler disappoint their socialist ambitions. 'Absolute power for Hitler - so long as he does what we want,' was their password. How far Born believed in all this, von Klönitz could not say, since there was no evidence in the files one way or the other. Also, Born was almost certainly not responsible for the arrest of Soennecke's couriers. It was one of the agents, a Bavarian 'communist', who worked closely with Born, who had put the Gestapo on their trail.

'A fine piece of work, Fritz,' Soennecke said, after a pause. He had difficulty in concealing how shaken he was.

Von Klönitz wasn't sure whether it was his work or the Gestapo's that Soennecke referred to. He passed his hand over his sandy, prematurely thinning hair, which he had parted on the left since childhood.

'A pity we don't know Born's real name. And who the bogus communists are. But we'll find all that out.'

'Might I now make a personal request?'

'A personal request? The same one, I suppose?'

'Yes, but this is the last time. You must either let me out of this or I'll blow my brains out. My final date is May fifteenth - that is, in seven days.'

'You can't present the Party with ultimatums.'

'I know, but I can't go on this way any more. I can't do it, I'm burned out, I've nothing left. You must understand!' he suddenly cried. 'I'm frightened, frightened!'

The big man trembled all over. He clutched at the collar of his uniform as though invisible hands were throttling him.

'Frightened? Who of?' Soennecke asked, and turned away.

'Not of any particular person. You don't understand, you won't understand. For years you've made me live this double life. I'm not made for this sort of thing. I'm a soldier, not a spy. I'm . . .'

'You're a communist, and that's all that counts. Everything else is unimportant.'

'I'm not a communist. I'm some sort of damned hybrid. You won't let me be what I want to be. I love a girl. I'd like to marry her. And I can't even propose to her.'

'Why not?'

'For God's sake, you must see why not. She'd have to believe she was marrying a nazi officer in the Intelligence Service. But I'm not a nazi. I am nothing of all I appear to be,'

He stood in front of Soennecke who came up to his shoulder. He still gripped the collar of his uniform, and for the first time Soennecke saw in his grey eyes a glint of desperation that might prove dangerous.

'Very well, Klönitz. You're quite right. It's all been going on for far too long. You must go abroad. Take your girl and live in exile somewhere. Good. But before you go we must tidy up the loose ends. Once the Party has been saved from this enormous, deadly danger that hangs over its head – which only you and I so much as suspect – then I'll let you go. Help me now, for the last time. But I warn you it'll be dangerous, and we may not come out of it alive.'

'Oh, to die, to die, like that – it'd be marvellous!' said Klönitz.

Soennecke smiled at the young man. He had really decided this time to let him out of the cage; to help him start a new life under the *wot-chto* people – this soldier whose life had been wrecked by a shot he had not even fired.

By rights Soennecke should at once have informed the leaders abroad and warned them, simultaneously showing up Störte and his great successes in a new light. But he decided not to do so. Nothing should be disclosed about the secret behind that miracle which the *wot-chto*'s ascribed to their sagacity and their precious Party line. First strike; explain afterwards. That was the proper way to set about it. *Wot-chto!*

3

Klaus Störte was a good comrade, a tough and valuable man. And Soennecke had been misinformed, too, for he was a man in the best of health, a powerful tree with strong roots. It was the feeling of solidity that he gave out which made his people love him; there was no solitude when Störte was there; with him everything always went right. And the fact that he had never deviated a hair's breadth from the Party line, that too was reassuring. Didn't they all know where men who once deviated could end up?

If things grew hot, Störte was always right there, always up in front in the most dangerous place. He didn't give his orders from the rear; he gave the example of how to behave, from the front.

He could make a joke at the right time, but he could also be deadly

serious. He could drink with the best, but he knew when a clear head was needed.

And he was far from uneducated, as Soennecke chose to believe. It's true he didn't enjoy reading, but he was always ready to listen if anything worth while were being said. He could tell what was important and what wasn't, and he had a remarkable memory.

Now, after more than a year, the two men were seated opposite one another again. It occurred to Soennecke that he might have underestimated Störte all along. Even in superficial matters he thought he'd always been unfair to him. For example, Störte was a handsome man for his type. Moreover, his appearance had improved – he had gone grey so that the blondness of his hair was less striking. Nor was his face so enormous, now that it had grown thinner and finer so that the individual features were more prominent: it was the face of an old sea pirate, grown wise and careful and even gentle with the passing years.

'You've changed, Klaus Störte. You've aged,' Soennecke said. It sounded like a congratulation, as though he were recognising a task ordered and achieved.

'Yes. Had a hard passage. Particularly at the beginning. You, you've grown younger, Herbert Soennecke. That's why they've never picked you up. They're looking for the old Spartakus fighter, and you look like a well-fed man in the prime of life. Ha, ha!'

'That's exactly what I am, Klaus, exactly what I am!'

They slapped one another on the shoulder. It was all starting very easily. Soennecke found Störte tolerable, even sympathetic, for he knew that within a few minutes this giant, this white-headed boy of the *wot-cho* people, would be beaten, drained, an empty husk. Störte, for his part, was equally certain of one thing, that Soennecke was as good as on the scrap-heap already. The decisions had been taken and Soennecke was to be ordered abroad. The successor could afford to be magnanimous.

'This district has cost me four of my best men. So I thought I'd come and have a look at the lion's den for myself, and try to find what sort of a lion it is that eats my people up this way.'

'Sounds as though in your part of the country they keep lambs in the dens,' Störte said. He hadn't yet grasped what Soennecke was getting at.

'No, not lambs. But our Berlin lions eat anything they can get their claws into. Whereas here the Gestapo arrests my chaps and leaves yours alone. Local patriotism on the part of the lions? Eh?'

'I don't think so. Maybe you choose the wrong men. Maybe while

coming here, or once they'd arrived, they followed the wrong sort of conspiratorial methods?’

‘What do you mean, the wrong methods?’

‘Well, I don't know. I wish I did. Anyhow, it's nothing to do with me. It's your affair. For example, I . . .’

‘For example you have such a superb organisation that none of your men ever get caught, and . . .’

‘That's so.’

‘Yes, that's so,’ Soennecke answered. ‘It must be so, otherwise there'd be a lot that'd be hard to explain, there'd . . .’

‘Everything can be explained, Soennecke, everything. And since you've finally come yourself instead of sending one of those miserable young men of yours . . . of course, I realise we're only one district among a great many. But this happens to be the particular one you've never cared for. The particular one where everything's gone unusually well. No trouble with the line, no breakdowns in communications, no whole sections nabbed at onc go, no . . .’

‘So tell me what your infallible method is, Störte. Teach me your tricks, you old wizard.’

‘Well, in the first place, rigid centralisation and control within the district – the exact opposite of your system. You're always insisting on rigid centralisation for the whole country with everything under your immediate personal control, but at the same time you want decentralisation within the districts themselves. It's your invention, the groups for each block of buildings, a newspaper for each block. Every factory for itself, every house for itself, a loose organisation, that's what you said, a breakdown into small units with a control network of very thin threads, that's what you said. You'd never admit that the thinner the thread the easier it is to break it. To smash one of your house-blocks the Gestapo doesn't even need to use agents. They can rely on voluntary helpers; there'll always be one or two men who'll investigate what's going on in their own block, as much for the fun of the thing as for anything else. And what's more they know their neighbours. The third time they find a pamphlet in the letter-box they know who put it there. And the next day they'll know who made it. And then that's one group caught: your thin threads have snapped, and a couple more comrades are in the Gestapo cellars.’

‘Ah, ha! And you don't bother with house-blocks and thin threads. You use steel cables. Right?’

‘Right. Steel cables. And I keep the ends in my own hands. I let them out or pull them in as I see fit.’

'You must have strong hands.'

'I have. Here, look. It won't cost you anything to have a look.'

'Yes, yes,' Soennecke said amiably. A few more minutes and he'd fell this giant, he'd silence this noisy man who shouted like a street-dealer peddling his wares. 'Yes, yes, they're strong hands, but I doubt if they control your cables on their own.'

'Quite right. I have men working with me, and their hands aren't soft either. With one exception they're from other parts of the country, previously unknown here. You see that way they're not on the Gestapo list for this area. Which is my second rule - never to employ local men in important jobs.'

'I see. And your one exception? Who's he?'

'You don't know him. But he's an interesting case and shows what my method is. The police caught him nearly a year ago, at the time they thought they'd smashed the whole Party. He got away by jumping out of a train. So what did I do? I arranged his funeral, announced his death, printed illegal leaflets protesting against his murder, and abroad they published his obituary. I had it smuggled into the country by the tens of thousands. We let the Gestapo capture a couple of hundred of them. His wife - they didn't live together, in any case - we packed off to Copenhagen in widow's weeds, where she appeared at various meetings. And when the comrade had recovered - I mean from the effects of his jump out of the train - he was an entirely new man, if you follow me. He began to believe himself that he'd died and been born somebody else. Of course, we even gave him a new face, a small operation - and he limped, now, too, on account of the accident . . . another man altogether.'

'I'm deeply impressed, Störte. That's what they call conspiracy. I see I can learn a thing or two from you.'

Störte nodded:

'Yes, he's the best man I have, from every point of view.'

The game had lasted long enough. Soennecke was not a cruel man, he was a fighter, and as such he felt pity for his victim even before he'd struck him down. He leaned forward and said:

'Störte, that man's a traitor, a Gestapo agent.'

'What?' Störte asked, quite calmly at first, shaking his head as though to rid himself of an irritating fly. And then, loudly: 'What! What are you saying, Herbert Soennecke?' He gave a 'bellow of laughter. 'A what? What did you say he was?' he laughed, louder and louder: 'Hannes, you say Hannes. . . .' Suddenly he stopped laughing abruptly. It was as though there was actually something stuck in his throat,

something that had broken in half and one half was stuck there, suffocating him, so that his mouth remained gaping open while he gulped for air, plenty of air, to clear his blocked windpipe.

'Why've you suddenly stopped laughing, Störte?'

Soennecke stood close in front of him, gripping the lapels of the other man's jacket, as though he intended to pull the giant out of his chair.

'What's made you stop laughing all of a sudden?'

Störte shook himself, finally closed his mouth, and said:

'Because what you said is really too fantastically crazy.'

'You're lying, Störte. You stopped laughing because you suddenly became suspicious yourself.'

Soennecke at last let go of his lapels and sat down again.

'Wait a minute. Think before you speak. I'll inform you that I've opened an enquiry about you. You're under suspicion. You've surrounded yourself with Gestapo men, you've handed the Party over to them, and that's the truth. The bastards started by helping you put the Party back on its feet here. But the fact that you stopped laughing like that is a possible proof to me that you're innocent. Think. Be truthful with yourself and with me - remember, I'm the Party now - and you'll see. You needn't be afraid: you'll get a chance to talk till you're blue in the face, later on. Now come here and look out of this window.'

The boathouse was remote and solitary. The road passed some thirty yards away, winding through the dunes to other boathouses. Well-to-do people in the town used them as week-end cottages. On weekdays the road was entirely deserted. Yet now Störte saw a large car parked on it. The man, waiting at the wheel, was looking in their direction. Soennecke opened and closed the window twice. Then he turned away. Störte, unsure of himself now, followed him in silence and sat down again.

They were both - Josmar and von Klönitz - wearing long dust-coats, but Störte saw at once that they were wearing Reichswehr uniform underneath.

'Goeben you've already met in Berlin. This other man is Fritz, a reliable comrade. The uniforms mean nothing. Fritz, tell Comrade Störte everything you know about the Born business.'

When Klönitz had finished his statement there was silence. Störte tried to speak. He opened his mouth but no words came. It was easy to see the effort he was making; his powerful body was shaken as by a spasm of cramp. The spectacle distressed Klönitz, who looked away, out of the window where the long grass on the dunes was moving

slowly in the breeze. Indistinctly they could hear the cries of gulls. Soennecke said:

'Wait, Klaus, don't try to say anything for the moment. If I were in your shoes I'd first let myself go. I'd shout or scream or probably both at once.'

His words had a good effect, but it was some time before the cramp relaxed its hold. At last Störte said:

'Quite clear. Give your orders, Herbert Soennecke. But before it's all finished I'd like to write a last letter to the Party abroad. You, Goeben, can deliver it personally.'

'What do you mean - before it's all finished?'

'Quite obvious,' Störte replied. From now on he had himself entirely under control again. He was calm and almost as sure of himself as he normally was. 'It's quite obvious I must die.'

'Die? You? Why? And leave someone else to clear up the mess? Is that your idea? And where do you suggest we find another Störte? It's true you're not such a terrific fellow as you think, but you're somebody. Besides, your reputation mustn't suffer, since it's also the Party's reputation and that of the working class. You can . . .'

Störte stood up and walked over to Soennecke. He leaned down towards him and tried to say something but couldn't. He cleared his throat noisily and then began:

'I was an orphan. My mother treated me badly. My stepfather always beat me if I cried. With a black leather strap. Do you understand? Dying means nothing to me. Do you understand that? I deserve to be killed like a mad dog. But if the Party still needs me, if my name - as you say - I was always a conceited chap . . . and if . . .'

Störte talked for a long time. It was very confused. Time passed. Eventually they managed to work out a plan.

Two knocks at the top of the door, then three at the bottom just above the level of the floor, and then he pushed the piece of paper underneath. They waited, listening. There was a scarcely perceptible noise, the sound of a bolt being carefully withdrawn: steps; a whispered word; Störte's reply, somewhat louder with another code word; then the door opened and Störte slipped inside, followed by the others. The man locked and bolted the door behind them. They passed down a long, dark corridor and came at last to a large, well-lit room.

'Hannes, do you recognise this man?'

'Yes . . . yes and no. He might be Herbert Soennecke.'

'It is. It is, Hannes.'

Hannes was almost as tall as Störte, but neither so solidly built nor so tough in appearance. Before his operation he must have had a handsome face: now it was remarkable, looking as though it were made of two faces, neither of them ugly, joined together. This also made it difficult to guess the man's age. By the way he moved he seemed to be still young.

'And these are two local comrades, whom perhaps you remember. I understand you had them both kicked out of the Party.' Soennecke indicated the two men who had entered the room behind him, and who were still standing near the door.

'Yes, I know them. We expelled them. They were compromisers and tried to make a common front with the social democrat bosses,' Hannes replied. He tried to catch Störte's eye, but the latter was gazing at the curtains which covered the window.

'I imagine you know why I'm here,' Soennecke began again.

'I can guess. You're handing over the national leadership to Störte. We've been expecting that, though not quite yet.'

'Ah, ha! And that's due to Störte's reports, which were actually written by yourself, isn't it? Answer me!'

'Well, yes, I did write them, but we discussed the matters to be included first.'

'Who's we? You and Störte? Or you and the Gestapo?'

'The Gestapo?' Hannes asked with amazement, though without raising his voice. 'The Gestapo? What do you mean?' And he laughed. It wasn't a loud laugh, and it didn't sound false.

The two men had already moved across the room. Without a word they lifted him from his chair. One of them forced his arms up, while the other took off his coat and waistcoat with a single movement. Then one of them calmly kept Hannes covered with a revolver, while the other undressed him. They left him only his shirt.

Störte took the clothes, emptied the pockets, and ripped out the lining of the jacket with one gesture.

Soennecke glanced through the papers that had been in the man's pocket, held them up to the light, and ran his fingers over them - all very slowly. Then he handed the papers back to Störte.

Finally Soennecke said:

'Have you your father and mother here? Brothers, sisters, a wife, children?'

'Why do you ask?' Hannes replied. His voice was cool.

'When did you join the Party?'

'1929.'

'When did you start working for the Gestapo?'

'Never. I'm not a Gestapo agent.'

'Ah, ha! So you have no connection with the Gestapo?'

'No.'

'Take his shirt off. It's not cold. He won't be uncomfortable naked. And even if he does catch cold it won't be for long. Dead men don't have to bother about blowing their noses.'

Then the man shouted – and at last his voice had changed:

'Klaus! Klaus! They're going to kill me and I'm not guilty!'

'Stop shouting. We don't like it,' said Soennecke. 'Why do you say "I'm not guilty"? Why don't you say "I'm innocent"? Answer me! Leave him alone, Ludwig. Paul, leave him alone. I don't want you to touch him. It wouldn't be any use. The Gestapo tortured him for forty-seven hours and he said nothing. It was only in the forty-eighth hour that he talked – and even then he said nothing important. He only became a traitor after they'd stopped beating him.'

'What? What's that you say?' Hannes asked, taking a step backwards. But he was too near the wall, and he banged his bare heel against it. His whole body began to tremble.

'Paul, put your revolver away. Give him his clothes and let him get dressed.'

The man was shaking so that his hands couldn't do what he wanted them to. They had to dress him and finally seat him on the chair.

Sonnecke, leaning forward, asked him:

'Are you so frightened of dying?'

'I don't know,' Hannes whispered. Then he repeated, somewhat more loudly: 'I don't know at all.'

'You know Störte, and you know who I am. And Paul and Ludwig are old comrades from Spartakus days. We shall try you in the name of the Party. You know that we'll be just, don't you?'

'Yes.'

'Good. But what matters is not the liquidation of a miserable wretch like you: the important thing is saving the Party.'

'The Party's in no danger. You don't know all the facts, which is why you think I'm a Gestapo agent. Through my connections with the Gestapo I've managed to arrange for months past for the Party not to be molested here. I'm in touch with the left wing opposition inside the Nazi Party. I must explain it all to you, the whole thing.'

What he said agreed, in essentials, with Klönitz's story. The only fresh piece of information was that, through his link with the Gestapo, he had made contact with certain S.A. leaders who were in fact known to be 'left wing'. Jochen von Ilming played an important part in these negotiations, and he had met him twice. Von Ilming had no connection with the Gestapo, and also knew nothing about the 'arrangement' between the Gestapo and Hannes. Von Ilming thought that the time might come when a national bolshevist party, having got rid of its old leaders, might seize power in conjunction with the nazi 'rebels' – either with or without Hitler, an unimportant detail. A national-bolshevist Germany, closely allied both militarily and economically with the Soviet Union, could, of course, overrun Europe and gain control of Asia and Africa. With this objective in view, Hannes wished to secure control of the Party for himself and break with the leadership abroad. He saw in this the only hope for the Party. Despite all this he remained – and he insisted on this – true to the Party line, not only in social and national matters, but also in his attitude towards Russia. He had not mentioned his plan to anyone, since he was well aware that people like Soennecke, entirely hidebound by their out-of-date prejudices, would never understand what a grandiose and intelligent plan it was. On the other hand, he was intending to initiate Störte into his secret bit by bit, and to win him over to his theory.

'And you still believe in all that stuff?' Soennecke asked.

'Indeed I do. But it'll all come to nothing now, since you're going to murder me. And apart from me there's no one who can steer the ship safely to harbour as von Ilming himself said.'

'What's your trade?'

'Wood-carver.'

'A good trade, I expect you were a fine craftsman?'

'Yes, but it's a long time since I did any work.'

'A pity, otherwise you might have had your wits about you. Now listen!'

It took Hannes a long time to realise that he'd been fooled, that he'd been nothing but an impotent tool in the hands of the police. But once he understood that and agreed he became completely dumb. What they wished to find out was exactly what he'd told the Gestapo, particularly in so far as the organisation of the district and its communications with abroad were concerned, and also which comrades, officials, meeting-places, hideouts and mail-drops were now known to the enemy.

Hannes obviously did his best to answer all the questions they put to him, but he couldn't always do so. He kept saying: 'Yes . . . no . . . I

don't know . . . perhaps.' He had hidden papers all over his flat, but he couldn't control his feet properly and they had to half drag him, half carry him from one corner to the other, from one room to the next.

Suddenly he pulled himself together and said:

'Come, we must get out of here. It's not safe for you to stay here. Go quickly and take me with you. I don't care whether you shoot me here or somewhere else, so long as you do it quickly and from the back so I won't know it's coming.'

Soennecke's plan was simple and he intended to put it in operation at once. All contacts within the district and with the frontier posts must be broken off immediately. All Störte's other fellow workers were to go abroad at once; they were to be told that they were being summoned to a Party congress, and the special services of the Party would then decide what would happen to them. Störte himself was to go to Prague. Hannes's fate would depend on how he behaved himself. It was desirable that he should stay where he was for the next couple of days, so as not to arouse suspicion with the Gestapo any earlier than was necessary and thus to give the others a chance to get away.

But they soon realised that this part of the plan was impracticable, since the man was obviously useless. Perhaps he had been unbalanced before – in any event he was now entirely hollow. Paul and Ludwig, who later on were to start rebuilding the Party from their respective factories, were to look after him for the next couple of days and were not to let him out of their sight. He'd have to be liquidated eventually – drowning was probably the best way, as then his body wouldn't be found for some time. Later the old comrades of the district would be told what had happened – not everything, of course, but enough for them to understand.

Their work was finished. There might be one or two more papers concealed in the hat, but nothing of any importance, or so they hoped. In any event they had the list of Party members, which perhaps he hadn't shown to the Gestapo after all, since it had been so well hidden. On the other hand, the nazis now had most of the cover addresses – and the people concerned would have to be informed at once, though it wouldn't be simple to get them all out of the country.

'The greatest danger has been avoided. The lesser one we can do nothing about. A dozen comrades or so will have to be lost,' Paul said.

'Yes, I know it's my fault,' Störte said. He didn't dare look them in the eyes.

'It's your fault all right, Störte,' Ludwig said. 'You insulted us old comrades: you were always blathering about the Party line. You kicked

us out, you turned our friends into enemies, that's what you did. But the Gestapo agents, they always stuck to the Party line. Spies always have an easy job with suckers like you. All they have to do is echo what you say - and you think they're good comrades. They must have laughed fit to burst when they were told to slander us in the leaflets - told to do it by you. And now, when . . .'

'That's enough,' Soennecke said impatiently. 'It's almost 2 a.m. and we've got to finish some time. Also there's the poor devil next door. What do you suggest? Take him with us or leave him here under guard for the time being?'

Just as they had decided he should be taken to the boathouse the shot rang out. He lay sprawled across the table. They lifted him up and laid him on the floor. He was dead.

'Extraordinary!' said Paul. 'Trembling like that, arms and legs like cotton wool, and he shoots himself clean through the heart first bullet. It's not as easy to do that as some people might think.'

'Enough talk. We must get going at once. That shot was certainly heard in the street. Put the corpse back on the table.'

When they stepped out on to the landing they felt the presence of someone else. But it wasn't until Störte had pulled the door to behind him, and they heard the lock click shut, that the light went on. It was a white spotlight and it blinded them. They ran at it. Störte grabbed the man with the lamp, shouting:

'Run for it! I can handle him on my own.'

As they dashed down the stairs they heard the sound of a heavy fall.

'Hurry, for God's sake!' cried someone from down below. It was Josmar's voice. Soennecke dashed on down, the other two behind him. Suddenly they were in a bright light. Josmar and von Klönitz were grappling with three men, one of whom wore the black uniform of the S.S.

'Look!' shouted Klönitz. The three men turned and saw Soennecke. The one in the black uniform was reaching for his revolver.

'Hands up!' bellowed von Klönitz in an authoritative voice. 'Hands up!'

Slowly the men raised their arms. Soennecke and his companions slipped out quickly through the front door. The car was waiting. Soennecke got in front next to Josmar, who started the engine and at last Klönitz jumped in the back. Paul and Ludwig had disappeared.

The first shots missed them, one passing through the back window without hitting anyone.

The heavy car couldn't make much speed through the narrow, twisting back streets. Soennecke asked:

'Why didn't you shoot them?'

'Too much noise. There's a police station at the corner of that street.'

'Why didn't they shoot you?'

'Probably had orders to take us alive. Later on they couldn't. At the beginning maybe our uniforms confused them.'

At last they reached the main road. They didn't realise at first that they were being followed, since the motor-cyclists were travelling without lights. The first shot hit von Klönitz who was sitting upright in the back. They had machine pistols and they kept up a steady fire. Curiously enough they didn't fire at the wheels of the car, and they hadn't switched on their headlights again. They raked the car body systematically, from left to right, and then from right to left.

The car was faster than the motor-cycles, and Josmar was visibly increasing their lead. After a bend in the road they stopped for a moment. Soennecke jumped out and Josmar drove on. The motor-cyclists rounded the bend and the chase began again. Josmar felt a bullet enter his shoulder.

Another bend and then a crossroads. Josmar stopped the car, dragged Klönitz over the back of the front seat, and propped him up against the wheel. He took the little suitcase and put the car in gear again. It started forwards slowly. Josmar jumped out and dived into the bushes.

CHAPTER IX

~~I~~ had taken Josmar over twenty-four hours to get to Berlin. He had gone roundabout way, using local trains and buses. By signs which only he could recognise he saw that there was somebody in his flat, and also that the link by which he could contact Soennecke had snapped.

All the newspapers carried the same stofy beneath large banner headlines but without much detail added to the bare police report: Major von Klönitz, travelling on duty, had been lured into a communist ambush where he had been foully murdered. The members of the communist murder-gang had all been captured save two, who had escaped during the night. The police were on their trail. The description given of the two wanted men could have fitted Soennecke and Josmar, though couched in general terms. It was to be assumed that

the police knew their names, even though the papers did not print them. Josmar couldn't see through the tactics of the police in this omission.

He was wearing civilian clothes. He had thrown the uniform, along with the little suitcase, into the river, since the bullet hole in the left shoulder of the tunic was plainly visible. The overcoat, too, had a hole through it and he'd stuffed it into the bushes. In a local train he'd 'borrowed' a grey raincoat from a sleeping fellow passenger. It was a very ordinary coat, the type that is mass-produced by the thousands.

He had washed carefully, shaved and brushed his hair. In his arms he carried a huge bunch of gladioli. He looked like a young man on his way to a family 'celebration of some sort - a birthday party perhaps. He had crossed the town three times on the East-West Metropolitan Railroad, and he had also twice made the whole trip on the outer circle. He had got rid of the gladioli by leaving them behind in a coffee-house; it was the sort of place where middle-aged lovers meet in the late afternoon. Now, carrying three long-stemmed roses, he was hanging about the buffet of a suburban station - a young man waiting with impatience for his girl, and only after two or three trains have come in reconciling himself to the fact that she wasn't going to turn up. By now it was evening again, the beginning of the third night of his escape. He travelled back to town. On the edge of a quiet residential district, which he had never set foot in before, he found a cinema.

Since it was dark inside he could fall asleep. It seemed to him that he woke at regular intervals. Once there was a fancy-dress ball going on in a studio. A poorly-dressed girl was standing on one leg on a table, while a gentleman drank champagne from her ballet slipper, and around them a happy group of people were dancing in a circle, the men wearing false noses.

On another occasion a girl was alone in a simply furnished room, gazing at a photograph of a well-dressed, smiling man with perfectly white and regular teeth. She was singing:

*You're the only man
That I can
Kiss!*

She was accompanied by a large, invisible orchestra.

When he next awoke another party was going on. The film was nearing its end and all the characters were wreathed in smiles. There was a short interval and then the second feature began.

Josmar awoke with the sensation that he recognised the voice speaking on the telephone. First he had to glance round to remember where

he was; he had slept so soundly that it took him a little time to come to himself. What was there about that voice? It had been part of his dream, 'but it meant more to him than just that. He looked at the screen. A moonlit night, and headlights playing on asphalt while an elegant car drove down an avenue. A quick cut and a shot of a little lake bathed in moonlight. The car stopped. A man, dressed as an officer of the nazi party army, got out followed by a lady in a white ball dress. They walked over to the edge of the lake. She, tall, white, like a statue of herself, stood sunk in contemplation of nature, and from somewhere a shepherd's pipe, playing a modern imitation of a Wagnerian pastoral tune, echoed her thoughts. Her golden curls tumbled over her shoulders and down her bare back which, in the low-cut evening dress, was turned towards the audience.

At last she turned to face the officer, who could be seen behind her, and thus towards the public. She said: 'You've given me everything, everything!'

Josmar recognised that it was Lisbeth right away. So she'd managed it, she'd succeeded. With intense interest he stared at the screen where her face, growing gradually larger and larger finally occupied the whole expanse. There was a tear of happiness visible on her left cheek.

Josmar leaned forward. So that was the face he'd loved, this woman who repeated 'everything' three times with exaggerated emphasis in a voice that was half a tone too shrill.

The thought occurred to him: 'She's sure to have a flat, is certainly above suspicion, and could put me up for a bit.'

He waited with impatience for the performance to be over. He saw Lisbeth again in riding habit, in a bathing suit — she had filled out — in a wedding dress, and finally dressed as an aviatrix. Her voice had grown richer, but it was still too thin as she spoke the closing words of this film inspired by the 'new spirit': 'I'll make a good wife for you, Hans-Heinz, a German wife.'

He found out from the programme that she now called herself Elizabeth von Grottenow. He couldn't find her number in the telephone book, neither under that name nor under her maiden name nor under Goeben. The next day he would ask the film company for her address. Meanwhile he had somehow or other to get through the night.

He took the train again, this time to Potsdam and back. Before dropping off to sleep he thought: 'This is likely to be the last night. I'm in a trap. I've had it. Lisbeth's help would come too late. It makes no difference any more.'

He was awakened by the heat and by a sensation of sexual excitement. The train was passing by well-lit advertisements which were redly reflected in the sky above. And then he knew with a curious, liberating certainty, that he wasn't lost. There was someone who would save him. At the next station, Charlottenburg, he got out. For years this had been the path he knew so well, a walk of six minutes if he hurried, seven and a half if he took his time over it. There was the street and there the house. In his old apartment lights were burning, but that meant nothing to him. Another car was parked at the exact spot where the black two-seater used to be. It was the second storey on the right, so this must be the bell. He couldn't read the name in the dark, but it didn't matter and it was better not to strike a match. He rang the bell, waited, rang it again. Either she was asleep or not yet home. He might have guessed it. Besides, it wouldn't have been any good. Then a car drove up, a two-seater, but grey instead of black. She got out. She was alone. She neither staggered nor danced.

'Good evening,' he said, 'I don't know if you know who I am.'

She looked at him, appeared to think deeply, took her keys out of her pocket, looked at him again.

'The light's too poor. I can't remember.'

'We've never met. I am . . . I used to be . . . your neighbour, over there, across the street. But I moved away two years ago.'

'So that's who you are.' She smiled. A good sign. He went on quickly:

'May I come up to your apartment? I know it's an unusual request, but it's frightfully important.'

The woman took a half step towards him, and looking him straight in the eyes asked:

'Kicked out of where you live? Nowhere to go and nothing to eat for the past two days?'

'No, it's not that. It's much worse.'

'Come on up,' she said.

She led him at once into the room with the balcony. With a tomboyish gesture she knocked her hat off her head, but she didn't remove her coat so he kept his on too.

'I don't like secrets. Not from my friends, and certainly not on the part of strangers who watch me sunbathing and come to call on me years later. What's your story? I know you're an engineer called Goeben, and divorced. I found that out when you left your apartment in such a hurry.'

'Yes, my name's Goeben. So you know that!'

'Well?'

'I've been shot, a small bullet wound in my upper arm, my shoulder.'

'Have you seen a doctor about it? Been to a hospital?'

He shook his head.

'Why not? Anyhow, what do you expect me to do about it?'

He said nothing. He hadn't thought out what to say to her before coming, and now his mind was a blank. A few minutes' rest, just to stretch out here, where he was in no danger, time to think up what to say.

The woman got up, threw her coat on the couch, and came over to him. She looked at him searchingly and said:

'You're on the run, aren't you?'

He nodded.

'From the police?'

'Yes,' he replied softly.

'I never read the papers. Have you committed some crime that's already in the newspapers?'

'No.'

'Very well, then. You may sleep here tonight and tell me all about it in the morning.'

She brought him a cushion and a blanket. He was to sleep on the couch.

His groans awoke her. She switched on the table light and leaned over him while he slept. His forehead was damp with sweat and he was clearly feverish. He hadn't undressed, having simply taken off his jacket. The shoulder and left sleeve of his shirt were stiff with dried blood.

She quietly brought a chair over to the bedside and sat down. Even when he groaned his body remained motionless. He was lying on his back, stretched out at full length. For minutes on end his face was twisted with pain. Then his features would relax and it would be once again the face of a fair, clean-cut young man.

'What can he have done,' the woman mused. 'And why should he have turned to me of all people? He ought to have come two or three years ago. It'd all have been so simple then. I wasn't expecting him exactly, but I remember wondering whether the young man from the third floor opposite would have brought me anything more than admiration for my naked flesh.'

'A young girl could easily fall in love with his face, not knowing that men with expressions like his are seldom good lovers. What this

sort of man wants is pity. They expect to be mothered, want a soul-mate, and so on. Now a nurse, too.

She went through the pockets of his coat. A pocket-book with several hundred-mark notes. A purse containing a few bills of smaller denomination and some loose change, all carefully arranged. A notebook. No addresses, but only long columns of figures and mathematical calculations. Another notebook, an unusually small music book, half filled with musical notations. A song, and underneath the music the words: *I'm alone . . . quite alone . . . and around me flow strange women's tears.*

'Strange women's tears. Meaningless, but it doesn't sound too bad. Probably his music and perhaps another man's words. He doesn't look like the sort of fellow strange women's tears flow around. I'm a strange woman, and my tears have never flowed for him, or for any other man for that matter.'

Yet even while these thoughts were crossing her mind she felt herself overcome by an unexpectedly deep feeling of malease. It was not just that once, long, long ago, she had cried on account of a man, cried as though by losing him she were being shamefully destroyed herself. It wasn't simply this sudden unavoidable trick of memory which gave her thoughts the lie that caused her discomfort; it was as though she felt that she had carelessly omitted to perform some act of vital importance. 'What can it be?' she asked herself impatiently, leaning forward and staring at the patch of blood on the strange young man's shirt. And then, all of a sudden, she knew what it was. The stranger before her was in appalling trouble and she was the only person in the whole wide world who could help him. And it was that that worried her about him, she who had now for so many years passed her life in a selfish, thoughtless search for enjoyment. All her love affairs -ridiculous incidents, love affairs with love subtracted - vanished like so many fantasies hastily dismissed because they are too stupid. Yet in this case, thank God! love didn't enter into it - that old business, always the same and so rapidly becoming boring, starting like a flight towards heaven and ending with a forgotten pair of pyjama trousers - accompanied by fear of pregnancy or an abortion, with the stupid lies that go with partings. But this man needed a strange woman's tears. She was now thirty-eight years old, and she couldn't expect much more. Was this to be her final rôle, the woman weeping for a strange man? The idea filled her with a mixture of discomfort and playful amusement. She was sure that she retained her free will in the matter. Once he'd woken up she could send him off and never see him again. Or she could

keep him there, help him, be both mother and friend to him, and as soon as he no longer needed her send him on his way. Or she could attempt to become his friend, and thus start a new life: it was late enough, though not too late, despite the calendar and despite all that her life had been up to then. She had desired in order to be desired in return. She had always given herself to make sure that she was desired. While thinking thus to herself she did not realise that something new was happening to her. She didn't desire him, yet already she wished to give herself, and it had suddenly become quite unimportant whether or not he desired her.

The voices woke him, that of the woman and an unknown male voice. He knew at once where he was. He kept his eyes shut, for he wished to find out what was going on.

'So that's all you know about him, Thea? It's little enough. Could be a murderer who's escaped arrest, a burglar, a spy, there's no telling, a bolshevik . . .'

'Impossible,' the woman interrupted. 'He's German.'

'I meant a communist.'

'A communist? He doesn't look like one.'

The man laughed good-humouredly: 'Well, you know all about that. In any case, first of all let's have a closer look at him. Wake him up.'

'Remember, Wilhelm, you did promise me not to turn him in. A doctor is bound by professional secrecy, isn't he?'

The man laughed again:

'First there was that wretched lout who faked an attempt on his life through jealousy; then there was your suicide with the family honour that had to be spared; from time to time there were your own little operations. . . . Thea, when will you finally pick on some decent, reliable man, or alternatively come back to me? My offer still stands, you know. All right, all right. Now wake up your hero. Leave us men alone together and make me some strong coffee.'

'Wake up, Herr Goeben. Here's Dr Lengberg. Yes, it's the same name as mine. He's my divorced husband.'

The doctor examined him.

'Been lucky. Harmless wound, young man. Not too late, though you've left it long enough. Bullet's still inside. In a good place. Could leave it where it is, but safer to have it out. So off to hospital you go. All over in five minutes and done with once and for all.'

'I don't want to go to hospital.'

‘Ah, ha! So he doesn’t want to go to hospital. A smart lad with no desire to draw the attention of the authorities to himself, eh? All right, all right. Suspected as much and made arrangements accordingly. Fix it all ourselves here. Frau Theodora Lengberg gets her beloved what he most wants, in this case a private operator.’

‘I’m not her lover.’

‘Not yet,’ the doctor said, laughing. ‘Not yet. Just wait. Everything in its proper time.’

The small operation only took an hour. Josmar, naked from the waist up, sat in the bathroom. He couldn’t put his shirt back on since his arm and shoulder were bandaged up.

‘Not a bad calibre,’ the doctor said. ‘Seen it before. Might be from one of those new Gestapo pistols. Can’t be certain, of course. Might be you’re the fellow who murdered Major von Klönitz. Eh, young man?’

‘Never heard of him,’ said Josmar. ‘I’m no murderer.’

‘All right, all right. Suits me better that way. Far as I’m concerned politics nothing but a lot of crap. Naturally I’m a good nazi, and intend staying one as long as the thousand-year Reich lasts. For the rest I’d prefer a decent monarchy – without too many Jewish doctors about. A clean shirt wouldn’t do you any harm, and just one wouldn’t make you a capitalist. Well, *Sieg heil!* God save the King! Up the workers! Down with anything else you fancy. It’s all a lot of crap as far as I’m concerned.’

Towards noon the woman brought him some shirts that she had bought. That evening they drove to Karlshorst where Thea had a house.

He was feverish for a few days, and on the second day his temperature rose. The pain was more noticeable, but it was bearable. He ~~was~~ weak, and slept a great deal. Whenever he awoke the woman was there, generally sitting by the big window that opened out on to the garden.

‘You have a beautiful place. It’s so calm. It’d be easy to forget everything here. One would have to be careful not to forget oneself.’

‘For years I’ve been trying to forget everything, and I’ve never managed to do so. And yet I haven’t got a good memory.’

‘It’s bad to forget. Besides, what we’re living through now is unforgettable.’

‘What are we living through now? And what’s unforgettable about it?’

'Don't you really know? What a pity?' he said, disappointed.

On another occasion, when for the first time he awoke with no immediate sensation of oppression and fear but instead with a feeling of being perfectly secure here – and she was sitting as always by the window, while the soft breeze of evening stroked his cheek as gently as a caress – he said:

'Evenings like this are dangerous. They make a man almost think he's lived the wrong sort of life, that he's done too much and too quickly. That, for instance, he should have played more music. That making music might have been the most important thing of all. That . . .'

She waited for him to go on. He was looking past her, out of the window. She would have liked to be closer to him, to gaze into his eyes and touch his cheek. But she didn't dare do so. She was still shy in the presence of this strange man, though she had been listening to his breathing for so long that now, when she left the room to prepare a meal or answer the telephone, she felt it to be an interference. To sit in this room with him was life; everything else was interruption.

She waited while he woke up, went back to sleep, moved in his dreams, awoke once more, uttered a few words addressed perhaps more to himself than to her.

If only everything could stay exactly as it now was, for days, for weeks – that was what she should like. For when at last he could get out of bed – what would happen then? She had no idea. She was only sure of one thing: it was good that this man existed and that she still was unaware of whence he came or why he had turned to her when in trouble – the nature and scope of which were unknown to her – and also that she didn't know whither he would go.

'It's high time I was getting up,' he said one morning. 'I'll stay on ~~here~~ for a few more days, with your permission.'

'Yes,' she answered, almost tonelessly. And then, pulling herself together, she added: 'Yes, stay as long as you like. It makes me happy, your being here.'

'I don't know how to thank you for all you've done. I . . .'

'Please don't talk about it, I beg you. I don't even know your first name.'

'Joseph-Maria, a ridiculous name. They call me Josmar.'

'Stay here, Josmar. You'll be out of danger here, and no one will disturb you. You haven't seen the music room yet. You'll like it. You said yourself that you should make more music. You could do that here, Josmar.'

He felt confused. He would have to bring himself eventually to thank this woman the way she deserved.

'You're doing your hair a new way, aren't you? Smoothed down, like that it looks more beautiful than ever.'

'It's dyed. I have brown hair naturally.'

'Dyed? I'd never have guessed it. But brown hair might suit you even better.'

'Maybe. I won't dye it any more.'

That was how they talked to one another during those days. Josmar tried to work out what answers he would give her when she began asking him questions. After all, perhaps she had a right to know who he was and how he'd been shot.

One evening – when she'd been sitting there silently all afternoon listening to him play the piano – he said:

'You're the most remarkable woman in the world. You picked me up out of the gutter and you've never even asked me any questions about myself.'

'You're such a clear, straightforward person, Josmar, so straightforward and fresh – even a child wouldn't need to ask you questions. To know me, though, you'd have to ask a great many questions, unpleasant ones, too. But you don't ask them, Josmar.'

This was the first occasion for a long time that she'd looked him straight in the eyes. He turned away, becoming thoughtful. He had desired this woman once upon a time, in a feverish adolescent sort of way. Now that she was beside him that desire existed only in his memory. Yet she was beautiful, and not in a common sort of way as he had thought in the old days and when he had spoken to her in front of her door. Was it she who had changed? Or he? Was it the effect of his wound and being in bed for a long time?

'There's no need for you to say anything, Josmar. That wasn't what I meant at all. Please play me your song. I mean the one you must have written yourself. The one with the words: *I'm alone... quite alone... and around me flow strange women's tears.*'

'How do you know about that song?'

'That first night I went through your pockets while you were asleep.'

He blushed:

'What was in them?'

'Don't worry, I didn't read any of your papers. There were only two notebooks, one full of figures and the other with the music.'

'Of course, you've a right to know. It's better I should tell you now.'

Even more so since your husband, I mean Dr Lengberg, guessed at once what I was. So you must realise, Thea, that I'm a communist. I'm engaged in doing illegal, secret work for the Party, the Communist Party naturally. I've been living under various aliases. Living is, perhaps, hardly the right word for it. Now they're on to me – not quite, of course, else I shouldn't be here. But it seems likely that the Gestapo know my various pseudonyms by now. They nearly caught me, two days before I came to you. That was when they shot a comrade, Major von Klönitz. I was only slightly wounded, and you saved my life. In two days' time I'll be going back to take up my work again. Meanwhile my life is in your hands. The slightest carelessness on your part would kill me. So now you know everything.'

He waited for her to answer. Since she remained stubbornly silent, he asked.

'What do you intend to do now?

She replied, without lifting her eyes from the tablecloth:

'I've never known how to hold back a man once he wants to leave.'

'That's not the point.'

'It is. It's the only point. You have no idea how much it means to me your being here. You can't guess what you've done for me, during all these days. And if now, already....'

She left the room, going from one piece of furniture to another for support, as though enveloped in a sudden darkness. He listened to her footsteps as she mounted the stairs. At last she reached the top. He heard the door of her room open and close. He stood there, not knowing quite what to do. Should he go up to her? And if so what should he say? For years he had known her – from a distance, and yet intimately. She was a frivolous creature, one of those bourgeois women gone off the rails, giving themselves to men without hesitation, scalphunters, taking men to their beds the way their fathers had tumbled the daughters of the poor. Adventuresses, carefully spending the money that they had inherited or that they received as alimony on the first of each month: so much for this and so much for that, presents for their boy friends, and the greater part going on cosmetics, massage, amorous week-ends in the country, a new refrigerator, a pretty lampshade, a little car, and so on and so forth. From time to time they would try to 'do something': a lover in the movie business was going to help them become an actress, a designer, a cutter. Or they would attempt something similar in the theatre or the plastic arts, or with children's books. Such women passed their lives in a panic terror of frustration; they must, above all, never give anything up, not let themselves go to seed,

never grow old. Always they were aware that somewhere or other there was the proper man, and they mustn't miss the fleeting opportunity for happiness. These women did nothing, they never had any time, they loved no one, and they were continually involved in love affairs. Now, Josmar decided, this Thea had fallen in love with him. He mustn't leave before she'd added his scalp to her collection. Very well, she could have it. This evening he'd play the piano, but tomorrow he would become her lover. In two days' time he'd go.

She naturally realised that her wish could not be fulfilled, for she was entirely in control of her faculties. And that was why she became increasingly silent. At that time, seventeen years ago, she had prayed: "Make what has happened not to have happened. Let me just wake up from the suffocating dream and see in the clear light of day that no part of it ever really took place." At that time she was not more devout than she was now, but she still carried within her heart the old hymns from the Lutheran prayer book; though they never crossed her lips they were still for her the best way of expressing her misery and her hopeless struggle to preserve hope itself.

And now, at the age of thirty-eight, she was overcome with a senseless wish to have lived an entirely different life. She would like to be a young girl, drawn to a young man who was the only man in the world for her, destined to be hers since the beginning of time.

She had only loved once, and had taken a terrible punishment - so much she could admit. What had happened afterwards, and was no longer admissible, had only been a game. She had given herself, with the gestures of true love, but it had been meaningless and had never really touched her. Yet how could she explain that to Josmar? He must imagine he knew her, having desired her and watched her in solitude for years on end. How could he know, how could she make him understand that she had been a sacrifice?

For Thea Seyfried had been sacrificed.

When, at seventeen, she became aware that she was in love, she grew frightened, for it seemed a danger to her. Gradually she gave in to her emotions, until finally it was only in her love for young Erwin that she really existed. Then the war came. He volunteered and went off. His unit, composed of volunteer students and called the *Ver sacrum*, was smashed in Flanders. They had sung patriotic songs at the tops of their voices, hoping thus to let their own artillery know who they were, but it was no good and they were mown down in rows. Most of them were killed by their own shells.

But Erwin came safely home. Far from the front he trained to be a flyer. He came to see her on Sundays and she, hiding her fear, was cheerful and gay. Their parents agreed and they were officially engaged. Then he went off to the front. The postman passed her house twice a day. At first she would wait in her room, then by the door, then at the garden gate. After a while she took to walking out to meet him, regardless of the weather, and finally she would wait for him at the door of the post office. It was enough to hold a piece of paper in her hand with his writing on it, to glance from time to time at the address and see his handwriting. It was a beautiful one, with no fancy decoration, each stroke of the pen as clear and straight as his expression, as firm and as simple as his gestures.

He was wounded and came home on a long leave. From the first moment of his arrival she found herself unable to forget that he would have to be going back. She was unhappy and, in consequence, he had a sad leave. She promised him that his next one would be entirely different: they'd be happy, living only in the present, forgetting all fear.

He came home again. She had known the date of his arrival weeks ahead, and she had made a study of the behaviour of happy people, their gestures, the way they smiled, their look of calm satisfaction and of contentment. Everyone told her that she was beautiful, and that all that was needed was for her beauty to become less hard: her lips should learn to open softly, and in her eyes there should be the laughter of an untroubled girl of twenty summers.

He came, and she found him changed, noisier than before, too noisy. He would look past her too frequently at other people, at women who went by. He talked incessantly about enjoyment, but he wasn't happy. On his last night she gave herself to him – in a cheerless station hotel. For she could not bear his leaving her like that. It was a night filled with confusion and awkwardness, and their pleasure seemed ridiculous, even miserable, the act of love became little more than a hasty piece of violence.

Only with the grim winter's dawn, just before the train was due to leave, did she find gentleness in his arms once again. Five weeks later came the news that he had been shot down and burned to death in his plane. No, there was no possibility of her viewing the body. In fact, after such a death, there was no body left to see.

For the first few days she was dazed, numb and incapable of movement and it was as though everything inside her had closed up. She didn't cry. Words of sympathy meant nothing to her, and perhaps she didn't even hear them. Even the persuasion that her people had to use

to make her go to bed, or eat, or fulfil her natural functions seemed to be unnoticed by her. When at last the numbness passed she began to cry. She couldn't stop. Then, for no apparent reason, her tears dried. She avoided speaking of Erwin, and she would let no one mention him or his death. Thea became hard and thoughtless towards her family. During the period after his death she had fallen out of the nest; she had no desire to climb back into it.

Lengberg, who was acting as their family doctor, established the fact that she was pregnant. She shouldn't destroy the child and she shouldn't tell her parents; instead she should marry him, Lengberg. He had long been in love with her, without hope of seeing his love returned; of course he realised that in view of what had happened the best he could expect was to be an *ersatz* – like the *ersatz* honey and the *ersatz* margarine in the shops. He was, he said, pleased about her pregnancy, since he had good reason to believe himself sterile as a result of certain youthful indiscretions, and so on.

He made no attempt to cheer her up. She felt that he was a man who had passed through some indelible humiliation, and who had found in vain cynicism the only possible method of going on living. He asked her to come and see him. She went again. Finally she agreed to his suggestion. She wished to leave home as soon as possible, and the child must have a father. So they were married.

However, the child was born dead.

For a while they stayed together. Then they got a divorce. His love, which she could not return, had become intolerable to her. For some time she lived a shadowy, lonely existence. Solitude did not agree with her. An accidental meeting with one of Erwin's old comrades – they had been in the same squadron – changed the course of her life. She became his mistress, more or less accidentally. Then there were other affairs of the same casual sort. Sometimes love played a part in them; absurd hopes that sprang up and were soon withered. It was better to forget about them quickly. No strong emotions, above all no suffering, that was the main thing. The years went by for her as they did for other women, those who loved and had children – those women whose one and only man had not been killed in the war.

But now the thing she had so long been avoiding had happened; she was in love. Yet she was not the woman whom Josmar could love, for she had wasted herself, squandered herself during all those years. Because what's done cannot be undone. He didn't even know that she was a sacrifice.

The following day Lengberg came. He examined Josmar thoroughly, changed the bandages – which would be the last ones, all being well – and gave him a strengthening tonic to take.

'As your doctor I'm satisfied with you. For the rest – do you know whom I was talking to about you? Don't look so frightened, there's no danger. I imagine you've heard of the poet Jochen von Ilming? Everyone has. Steel nightingale, latest edition. Anyhow, he doesn't know your name, but he thinks he knows who you are. I say again there's nothing for you to be frightened about, Herr Goeben. Von Ilming's an old patient of mine. You see, boys exhaust men: I have to pump a little manly strength into him. A breach of professional secrecy, of course. Well, that's my style. Anyhow, I'm to tell you that a certain gentleman, a very certain Herr Soennecke, is at present having a fine time in Prague. They nearly nobbled the great leader, nearly, but not quite. Clever chap, that one, eh?'

'I don't know Herr von Ilming,' Josmar said.

'Should know him. Ought to be in Baedeker's with three stars. Well worth having a look at. Very popular in this house. Get Thea to ask him over to tea one day.'

The doctor was a large, heavy man, but he could move with great speed. While talking he thrust his huge chest forward as though forcing his way through some obstacle in his path. Josmar didn't like him. The false joviality of Prussian reserve officers repelled him; they were quickly recognisable by their tendency to drop the articles and personal pronouns.

'Now for a little serious conversation, Herr Goeben. You still haven't made love to your charming hostess. Pity but not too serious. What is serious is that Thea's in love with you. I say in love with you: I don't say she wants to go to bed with you. Next, there's only one person here who can get you out safely and transport you over whatever frontier you choose. That's me. You fall in love with Thea, and in, let's say six weeks' time, I'll see to it that you go by private sleeper to, let's say, Zurich.'

'Excuse me, doctor, but . . . all the same . . . a man can't fall in love to order. I mean . . .'

'Rubbish. I'm not giving any orders. First pray and faith will follow on its own, a sound Catholic doctrine, or so I've heard say. On the other hand, I can put up with almost anything, with one exception: I won't see Thea made unhappy. Hobby I took up many years ago. If things don't work out properly here, I mean the love business and all that goes with it – in that case I'd find myself unfortunately with no

alternative but to get rid of you. Unpleasant for me, but a damned sight more unpleasant for you, Herr Goeben. I'd advise you not to drive a blackmailer to extremes.'

'This is all most grotesque and undignified. And extremely silly, too!' Josmar interrupted.

'I don't give a good goddam for your dignity or mine or that of anybody else in the world. You think I'm grotesque because you know absolutely nothing of what life is all about. You're the one who's grotesque, living beside the most wonderful, purest woman in the world, who loves you - and you can do nothing except behave like a half-witted Joseph, you idiotic world-improver. Have you ever thought what it would mean to be able to say on your deathbed: "I once succeeded in making one person happy. One single person. Not the whole world, but one single woman?"'

The longer Lengberg talked the more Josmar became convinced that the man was suffering deeply, that in some curious way he was insane, a figure from a Russian novel dressed up as a German. He was disciplined in behaviour, confused and yet methodical in mind, with exaggerated though not particularly strong emotions. Josmar had good reason to be afraid of him. And besides, it was true that this man could save him. Yet the complication of Lengberg's emotions filled Josmar with anxiety. How does a man answer when he's ordered to fall in love, immediately and for a limited length of time? What was he to do when confronted by such blackmail, which might even be two-edged?

Thea's appearance interrupted Lengberg's monologue. She invited them to come out on to the terrace for tea.

Thea drove into town every other day, and Josmar had got her to put two announcements in the principal morning paper. The text, meaningless to the uninitiated, was in a code previously arranged with the apparatus who were supposed to reply by means of a similar announcement. No answer was forthcoming, and thus his last hope of re-establishing contact was gone. Therefore, he had to go abroad to get in touch again. Von Ilming usually knew what he was talking about, and therefore he could assume that Soennecke actually was abroad. Josmar must get to him as soon as he could.

'Would you like it if I went abroad and gave them your news?' Thea asked.

'What put that idea into your head?'

'You're very transparent, you know. I told you once that everything

to do with you is clear. It's quite incredible that anyone like you should be a conspirator. It's a miracle nothing's ever happened to you before now. You must have a guardian angel that looks after you, a communist one, of course. But since there are no angels I assume women took over the job.'

'No!' Josmar replied, far too seriously. 'Not women. I've never had any luck with women, and I've never brought them luck, either. For example, I . . .'

Suddenly he saw again Erna Lüttge's garret. He would have liked to speak of her. But what was the use? Thea wouldn't understand. In any case, there was no point to it.

'Don't you trust me yet, Josmar?'

'Of course I do. Absolutely. But you belong to another world, that's all.'

'You're wrong there. It's a long time since I belonged to anything. I was plucked out of the ground and my roots have withered away. I'm a child without parents, a mother with no children, a wife without a husband. And now, since I've fallen in love with you I'm a mistress with no lover.'

Josmar didn't know what to reply to this. The best thing to do would be to take her in his arms; on the other hand, it might be clumsy, even tactless, to do so at this precise moment. Finally he said:

'You shouldn't fall in love with a man like me. Before I could belong to you I'd have to be able to belong to myself. But I . . . I'm not a free man. The Party means more than my private life.'

'You're free, since you can break these bonds. There's the garden, and over there the piano. The wall around this house and garden is high. You wouldn't even have to forget the outside world completely. It'd be enough if you just wanted to live to enjoy a little happiness for once. Everything else would fade into the distance, might even sink out of sight. But you needn't be frightened by my love. I'll never mention it again. I'll . . .'

There were tears in her eyes. She stood, leaning against the balustrade with her hands held up in front of her. When he put his arms around her she remained motionless, almost resisting him.

The first few days were like the days of first love. For both of them the past had ceased to exist. Yet, once these days were over, it resumed its domination.

As though passing over a high arch, Thea returned to the time when she had been twenty. Love was a mixture of happiness and anguish.

There was anxiety for the beloved, who might so suddenly vanish. Dying of thirst by the fountain itself, in the very arms of her lover she longed for the certainty that what now was would always be. In the warm sunshine she froze, overcome by her dread of the sun's going down.

Josmar became fully aware of this only on the day he played for her, as a joke, the song that she had found in his music book.

She said:

'A funny mixture. Parts of it remind me of Bach, and parts of it are just atonal confusion.'

'No,' he answered. 'That's no atonal confusion. Atonal music is actually much closer to Bach than any popular Wagnerian hullabaloo. However, there are certain small mistakes in my composition, particularly in the accompaniment to the second verse, which you quite rightly found distressing. But there's nothing I can do about that.'

Since he said it laughingly, she asked, puzzled:

'Why not? You could easily change it.'

'Of course I could. Like this, for instance.' And he played her an alternative version. 'But that wouldn't have done it. It wouldn't have fitted the text. Wait a minute. You don't understand yet.'

He laughed boyishly, as though it were a clever joke that he'd pulled off.

'You see, I'm not talking about the poet's text, which just came to hand, as it were. The music itself is its own text. I'll play it again. There you are. Now I'll read you what the notes, arranged in that particular order, mean: "District VIII. Active cells in process reconstruction electrical factory S.B. Contact established left wing soc. elements. Groups of five varying stages development. Cadres decimated following latest police action. Distribution foreign material poor. Brown Book unknown. Special action to coincide impending trial of the fourteen imperative. Suggest sending special delegate with particular emphasis frontier contacts. New cover addresses urgently needed. Inform Com. Lüttich and Maestricht immediately." Do you see now? You do, don't you?'

He hadn't noticed that while he was decoding the music she had got up and was staring at him with something like horror in her eyes. Now she said:

'So that's it. I do see now. All that stuff about women was just so much camouflage. The music is just camouflage. It's all a trick. All that's true is that new cover addresses are urgently needed and Lüttich and Maestricht must be informed at once.'

'Yes, that's right,' said Josmar. Then only did he realise that Thea was having difficulty in not falling down. It was as though she was trying to avoid fainting. 'What's the matter with you?'

Going from one piece of furniture to another, as he had seen her do once before, she left the room. He followed her up the stairs, but when she entered her bedroom he left her.

Of course he'd have to go back to his comrades and to his work. All the same he'd be justified in staying here for a few more days, or even a few more weeks. He was on leave and he richly deserved a rest. When Thea had begun living with him she had known he was only on furlough, a dead man living on borrowed time as a French revolutionary had once put it.

Had it been careless on his part to tell her that his music contained encoded messages? Nonsense, since it was a well-known system. He himself had perfected three such codes for various purposes; this week he'd work out a fourth, and finally a combination of all four. He went back to the music room. There was no future in worrying about the strange behaviour of women; even clever self-controlled women such as Thea or Relly or Mara often reacted quite illogically. The upper class brought up their daughters even more stupidly than they did their sons.

Only late that night, when, having made up their quarrel, she was sleeping with her head on his chest so that he dare not move, only then did he realise what had happened and grasp the nature of Thea's complex fears. And for the first time, though not very clearly, he began to speculate about the sense of living as dangerously as he did. There were many thousands like him in the world, taking it for granted that they ought to sacrifice themselves for the cause. There was much that might be questioned, but not this; the Party had the right to control the Party member and to lay down what his life was to be. Had the Party the right to do as it wished with his happiness? Strange, absurd question! It was the first time that Josmar had ever asked it, because this was the first time that he had ever been happy. Also now it had become abundantly clear to him that there was no such thing as one single, personal sacrifice. Behind each individual who sacrificed himself there stand others whom he must sacrifice as well – and without asking them whether or not they approve.

He listened to the chirruping of the crickets and to the light breathing of the woman who suffered on his account. How is it possible to leave such a woman, and what justification can there be for causing such a one pain?

The voices that then whispered to him would have grown louder had he only been prepared to listen to them. He didn't dare do so. The time was coming when he would have to break off, break out. A man cannot abandon a truly great work, since it is not he who has chosen it, but rather it that has chosen him. Woe to the man who is abandoned by a truly great work!

Already next day Josmar began to make his plans for returning to the world. Already he had about him the look of one who is going away and has no thought of coming back: objects, assuming a strange mobility all their own, seem to recede even though they remain within arm's reach.

'Why are you so anxious to bury something that's still alive? Why not wait until it dies, or kill it?'

He tried to make her more cheerful. If he were to stay abroad for some time she was to join him there. His going away didn't mean an ending. It was only here that he was in danger; out there nothing threatened him. Out there were his friends, his comrades, solidarity. Out there . . .

Yet she believed no part of it. They were never to talk about it, and he was to tell her nothing of his plans for the future. An hour, no, a half hour, a few minutes before going he was to let her know — not before. Until then she didn't want to think about his departure.

But she thought about it the entire time. All the same she had no difficulty in concealing from Josmar how sad her happiness was.

'Your side of the bargain properly fulfilled. Make no bones about admitting it,' Lengberg said in his usual brusque manner. He had hurried straight out, when Josmar had telephoned him and asked him to come. Thea was in town for the day.

'Everything for the best in the best of all possible worlds. Good. Pack you up in plaster. Induce a temperature. Out on a stretcher. Ambulance to the station. Private sleeper to Davos. Have all the necessary papers here. Dr Hans Georg von Ballstrem's the name. Please read carefully and commit details to memory. Expenses, your responsibility. If you can't manage them, I'll pay. Date of departure not yet fixed. A week-end best, probably June 30 or July 1. Thea must know nothing beforehand. You're entitled to start breaking her heart five minutes before departure and no earlier. Right? All quite clear? Very well, then. Up the workers! Sieg Heil! Down with . . . with Hitler,

Stalin, Wilhelm II, anyone you like. . . It's all balls as far as I'm concerned.'

* He came back.

'Since you're a decent sort of fellow - and absolutely between ourselves - there's something in the air. Hitler's got cold feet. Not because of your gang, I may say. Who is it? That's the riddle. You guess it, if you can.'

Before leaving he put the passport on the table. The photograph showed a man who in fact looked not unlike Josmar.

There were times when everything was easy. They would lie in the garden, planning the voyages they were going to take together. The sky was blue, the sun shone brightly and it was hot. But not too hot for them, since there was the cool sea nearby and the patio was fresh and shady. The trees were heavy with fruit, and all the year round the earth was fruitful. So they dreamed of the south, of running away to some place where life was simple.

There were such times. There were others when they felt a compulsion to talk of their pasts, a past in which everything that had happened had deliberately led up to their coming together. Each success, each failure, each wrong turning and each twisting path assumed a significance for this present, this hour in which they were truly alive.

There were other times, serious and heavy with menace; then Josmar would try to explain to her what the great struggle was about and why neutrality was impossible. She, too, must take up a stand, must commit her well-placed solitary house, her money, even herself. He was never quite sure whether she really listened to him, and, if she did, whether she really understood.

One day she ran into the music room where he was working on his fourth code. She had an idea. She'd give the Party her house, three-quarters of her fortune, which was not inconsiderable, if necessary the whole lot, including the American securities her uncle had left her - and thus she'd buy him out of the Party. He could remain a Party member and pay his Party dues, but not be active any more, and above all not live in Germany. They'd go off together, to some South Sea Island, for example. Well? He then realised that she'd understood nothing, absolutely nothing.

She tried to think of other ways of getting him out of 'the service'. One day she motored into town very early and went to see Lengberg. She asked him if there were not some illness that was incurable but

not dangerous provided the patient led a quiet and retired life and confined his activities to, say, composing music. Of course, the illness mustn't be a painful one, or at least only very slightly so. Lengberg, who was always bad-tempered early in the morning, replied with a single word:

'Leprosy.'

One day Josmar told her about Hanusia and mentioned that her husband, the Ukrainian Hans, had been expelled from the Party. When she grasped the fact that it was by no means difficult to be expelled, that, for example, disagreement with the Party line was enough – she began scheming how she could send a message to the Party chiefs telling them that Josmar had been untrue to the 'line'.

Not knowing quite how to set about this she turned to Jochen von Ilming for advice, an old friend of many years' standing. Whenever he had had to get rid of some 'sinister young man' or had found a new 'absolutely uniquely marvellous boy', he was in the habit of coming and telling Thea all about it. In the former case he usually explained that he was achieving final success in his superhuman efforts to free himself from 'the most debasing form of bondage known to men, namely, the passion for boys': now he intended to get married, have children, and start a *vita nuova*. On the other hand, if he had just got to know a new young man, then he was proud, a fallen angel reconquering heaven. The most beautiful boys in the world surrounded him; he was recreating a new Hellas around himself; and he had selected a vital young god who, as it happened – out of pure coquetry, of course – was for the moment resisting his advances.

Thea had limitless faith in Ilming's political experience, that strange nazi for ever insinuating that in fact he was as close to the Kremlin as he was to the Brown House.

'Yes, there'd be no difficulty in getting your friend excommunicated by the one true church. The only question is, what good would it do you? Suppose he were then to attach himself to some other group that was equally busy committing its members to the flames? What then? Suppose he showed the customary crazy zeal of heretics to justify their faith at the stake? His expulsion wouldn't have been any use in that case, would it?'

'Is there no way of saving him?' Thea asked, a note of despair in her voice.

'The best way to cool the ardour of a revolutionary, the only sure way, is to put a bullet through one of his vital organs. An alternative, should world history permit it, is a child. My French colleague, Count

Victor Hugo, who sprouted big words the way an Angora sheep sprouts wool, once remarked that the cradle is the hope of humanity or something else equally moving to that effect. In the long run the three magi and the shepherds grouped around the cradle at Bethlehem were simply revolutionaries *ratés*.

'A child?' Thea asked, thoughtfully.

'Yes, a child. But it'd only work after he'd been expelled from the Party and slandered by his old comrades, and left to brood for a while on his own.'

From this subject Ilming easily managed to divert the conversation into fresh channels, describing at length a new 'young god' whom he was about to lure into his bed. So Thea had no further opportunity of talking to him about her troubles. She left him none the wiser. She was sure that she wasn't pregnant. And time was running out.

In fact, there was even less time than she thought. Lengberg had everything prepared. It was his habit to make sure that all his undertakings went without a hitch, as in an operating theatre. The date was fixed for July 1. The night before Josmar would be put in plaster; then the stretcher, the ambulance, the train to Davos and so on.

It didn't work out that way. Early on the morning of June 30 the doorbell rang. Josmar, who always was a light sleeper after first light, heard it and woke Thea. She went out to see who it could be.

'It's Ilming. He's put his car in the garage to cover his tracks as he puts it. He seems quite hysterical and keeps talking about all hell having broken loose. You stay here. I'll bring you up your breakfast right away.'

Ilming couldn't bear remaining indoors. He went out on to the terrace where Josmar, from behind the window curtains, could watch him. At first he just strode wildly up and down; then he broke into the route-march step of the German infantry, performing a regimental, though not exaggeratedly formal 'about-turn' each time he reached the end. He didn't at all resemble those photographs that Josmar had seen in the writer's home on the occasion of his meeting with Soennecke there. He was neither so tall nor so slim, and his thinning brown hair only half hid his bald pate.

'I don't want to upset you,' Thea said as she wheeled the tea-trolley out on to the terrace, 'but what exactly do you mean by all hell having broken loose?'

'Macbeth murders sleep.' Hitler murders during sleep. He is drown-

ing the second revolution in the blood of those very men who raised him to power on their shoulders.'

'I don't understand what you're talking about Jochen. What second revolution?'

'Originally it was a simple, rhetorical phrase that I coined one day, lightheartedly enough. A few numbskulls adopted it seriously, so that they might have a slogan for which to fight. And now Hitler is using that rhetorical phrase as an excuse for slaughtering the finest and most virile men in all Germany. My dear Thea, I'm a dead man, I'm proscribed on the list of the tyrant.'

'I can't understand a word of what you're saying.'

'And yet it is all quite clear. Today dies Sparta foully murdered by Byzantium, conquered by her womanly wiles.'

During his drive down, though he had been extremely frightened, Ilming had still managed to polish a few phrases. He was taking the first opportunity of using them.

What did the windbag mean? What had really happened? What was going on in the Third Reich for a man like Ilming to be in danger? Josmar couldn't wait any longer. Dressing quickly, he hurried down, out on to the terrace.

'You're Herbert Soennecke's young man, aren't you?' was Ilming's greeting. He looked him up and down the way a habitué of a brothel might examine a new inmate. But Josmar, good-looking as he was, was too old to be a 'young god'.

'What's happening, Herr von Ilming? Please tell me as simply as you can, leaving out the bits about Macbeth and Sparta and Byzantium.'

'A few hours ago the leaders of the S.A. were murdered, either by Hitler or on his orders. The S.A. is at this moment being disarmed. Groups of assassins are moving through Germany. The fat-buttocked Goering has ordered that the action must be over by tonight.'

'What is the point of the action?'

'There is no point. It's suicide. When the government decides to murder a man such as me, then it is ringing its own death knell.'

Josmar said:

'When the government decides to kill you, I should say it's your death knell that's ringing and not the government's. In any case the bastards were bound to have gotten rid of you once they felt they didn't need you or your balls about Sparta any more.'

'What? What's that you say?' Ilming asked, drawing himself up. But he soon became deflated again. Nothing mattered any longer, and

he gave up; he began biting his nails furiously, a habit he normally only practised in secret. Josmar, who was a good head taller, looked down at him:

'Listen to me. This is something far more important than you and your rhetorical phrases. This is, under the surface, the class war. There is a crack in the régime. It must be widened. This is the beginning of the end.'

It was a good exit line for him, and he was glad Thea had seen it all. Now he must hurry. There could no longer be any question of his going abroad. Bärtchen had been proved right and Soennecke wrong. The dictatorship was crumbling. It was only now a question of days before they came into their heritage.

He led Thea to one side:

'Drive me to the station. I'll catch a train to town. I'll ring you up this afternoon. You'd better pack up my things. I'll probably be back this evening.'

'You can't do that, Josmar. You'll be getting in deadly danger.' She took both his hands in hers. 'Don't go! Wait a little! Wait and see what happens! Don't leave me like this!'

'I'm not leaving you. You don't understand. It's all different now. Go and get yourself ready and get the car out.'

She watched him, waiting, but he looked past her towards the city. Everything was quiet, yet he seemed to hear a call, summoning him and his people.

She drove him to the train and he talked without stopping all the way. She said nothing.

That afternoon three S.S. men came and took Ilming away. They punched him in the face and hit him about the head with buffalo-hide whips while dragging him down the steps and pushing him into the car. He let them do so without a murmur.

Thea waited for Josmar's call. She waited all evening for him to come back. She drove to the station and waited there until the last train had come in. She waited all night in Josmar's room. In the morning Lengberg arrived. He seemed amazed that Josmar had disappeared. Everything was prepared and he could so easily have crossed the frontier.

Lengberg led her to her room, put her to bed, and gave her an injection.

'Harmless, my dear, quite harmless. Something to put you to sleep.' She was soon sleeping soundly.

When she awoke he was sitting by the window. Thus had she

watched Josmar sleeping – and it had proved of no avail. She closed her eyes.

Without turning towards her, Lengberg said:

'In novels a woman in your position will glance by accident into a mirror – I repeat, by accident – and discover that within a few hours she has suddenly become old. Not so in this case. You're still a beautiful mature girl. All the same, it's high time you were married. That's what I'm for.'

She said:

'Do you think I'll never see Josmar again? Give me another injection, a stronger one this time. I need a long, long sleep.'

While injecting her he quoted:

'Oh God, who steered me safely from the harbour, let me sleep, let me sleep.'

She slept.

He sat down by the window again. Evening fell slowly. He had plenty of time. He could wait. That was something he had proved to himself.

The Goebens, the Ilmings, such people aim high. In his life there were only two things he had ever really desired. From the age of twelve he had wished to be a surgeon. He had achieved that ambition. From the age of twenty-seven he had wanted Thea Seyfried. When first he had succeeded it had been too early. The right time was now.

He made himself comfortable. In the sky the stars were beginning to come out. Somewhere, no great distance away, he could hear shooting. A blessed night, the beginning of a new life.

The purge was completed the next day. The régime was all the stronger in consequence.

PART FOUR

'...Nor those who go down in silence'

CHAPTER I

I

It was too late now. The man wouldn't come. It wasn't just two hours. The man was a lifetime too late. During the past year this had often happened. Doino knew exactly what took place. Everything was arranged, down to the smallest detail. The messenger who might be a man or recently quite commonly a woman, needed only to fulfil certain formalities, such as getting his passport and his tickets. The meeting-place 'out there' had been agreed in advance. Somebody like Doino had already left Paris, for example, in order to meet the messenger at a particular hour of a particular day in a certain beauty-spot just outside Oslo. And then the man didn't turn up. He was told he'd get his passport twenty-four hours later than he had expected, and meanwhile he was to stay at home, since the authorities might require a little more information from him. The amount of information they demanded grew and grew, until he might just as well sit down and write his autobiography. He'd have time enough since the date of his departure was postponed again. In fact, he might as well resign himself to staying. There was a small cell prepared for him nearby. He would occupy it for a few weeks, perhaps a few months, maybe a little longer. 'Never miss a chance to empty your bladder, comrade!'

Over there in Germany, when a man failed to keep an appointment, they feared the worst; it usually meant the enemy had got him.

When a man from Russia failed to turn up, it meant that he too was lost, but it wasn't the enemy who'd killed him. And no pity was allowed him. The man who came in his stead, several weeks later, would have one more item to deal with: what was known against his predecessor? Had he, the last time he was abroad here, made suspicious statements? Had he not some very doubtful friends?

The afternoon would not softer into evening, and night would not fall. The sun remained brilliantly poised above the horizon. At last, Doino thought, he would see for himself one of those white nights that he had read about in the books of the great Northern writer. For over fifty years now the old Norwegian poet had been plagiarising himself, telling the same stories over and over again and drawing from them a political philosophy of unparalleled stupidity. Doino all the same had

adored his books when he was very young, and he still had a deep feeling of gratitude whenever he thought of the old man. And he had reached the age at which a man realises that the gratitude he has been able to give attaches him closer to life than does the love he has been able to afford. During those long evenings of early summer emotion became muted since only one certainty remained, becoming almost tangible: the whole of the past was lost for ever and irremediably finished and done with. The renouncement was made without despair and was, therefore, not cruel. He would fade away like the dying day, reconciled with all the world. Only in such moments could he free himself from possession by the past decade and by those memories that he dragged with him everywhere he went like so many leaden weights.

'Your name's Faber, isn't it? Denis Faber? I'm called Albert Gräfe, but that makes no difference. You probably know about me, but you don't know me or my name.'

'Are you a comrade?'

The man's mouth twisted into a hideous, painful grin.

'Yes, I think so. It's difficult to be sure.'

'I've seen you before. Where was it? And when?'

'The first time was two hours ago, down there in the Karl-Johansgatan. Then in the bus that brought us up here. Then in the café over there. You looked at me from time to time, as you did at the tree beside the road and the blue-striped awning on the terrace, though, of course, not as closely as you examined the fjords down there or the brown sails of the boats.'

The man seemed to be about thirty. He was obviously one of those people who have been aged by something more than the passing years. He was not tall, but he was stockily built and his shoulders were remarkably broad. He was unnaturally thin, as though he had recently been suffering from a long and serious illness. But looking at his face Doino realised that it wasn't sickness that had wasted him away.

'You've come out of a concentration camp, comrade?'

'Yes. First the Gestapo cellars, then two and a half years in prison, then four months in a concentration camp. My left eye's no good. The specialist here thinks he may still be able to save the right one. In any case he's doing what he can for me.'

'Sit down. Tell me what I can do for you. But first explain how you know who I am.'

— 'I've listened to you speak, in Berlin and Leipzig. I've attended lectures of yours, too. The comrades didn't always follow everything

you said – rather too many difficult words – but they enjoyed listening to you. So did I.'

They both gazed at the fjords down below, like black mirrors tinged with pink near the shore. Perhaps Gräfe, too, felt the need to make the most of the silence, deliberately and without haste. His face relaxed and the ruined eye was less painful. His well-shaped mouth was partly open. The pinkish light lent his pale and sallow complexion a fresher hue, such as perhaps it had once had of its own.

For a moment Doino thought of postponing their conversation, of arranging to meet him some other time, down in the town. Then he saw that the man had already waited too long. He could, indeed, still keep silent, but that was because his silence was now shared with one to whom he wished to speak.

'We've plenty of time, but speak when you feel like it . . . I'm listening.'

'Yes,' Gräfe replied. 'Yes, I'll start in a minute.'

For a while he remained silent, perhaps dreading the necessity of tearing his eyes away from the horizon and contemplating his own troubles once again. At last he said:

'You're still a friend of Herbert Soennecke, aren't you?'

'A friend? Herbert Soennecke?' Doino repeated, a note of interrogation in his voice. 'Yes, though it's over a year now since I've been in contact with him.'

'We'll get nowhere like this,' Gräfe said, impatiently. 'I want straight answers.'

'I didn't send for you, and I haven't promised you anything. Say what you want to say. Tell me where you've come from and where you're going. And if there are any questions, I'll ask them.'

Gräfe looked at him with amazement. Yes, of course, the man was an intellectual, with reactions that in the larger sense were easy to forecast but that in individual circumstances might be unpredictable. Sometimes his face assumed the expression of a spoiled child, incapable of bearing pain, and sometimes that of a hard, cruel aristocrat who only opens his lips just wide enough to allow biting insults to pass through his teeth.

'True enough, Faber. You didn't send for me. But I'm here now. We're together here. There is a reason for my asking questions. All the same, perhaps it would be simpler if I started by telling you my story.'

He told him his name again, and also the town he came from. He was a mechanic by trade. He had joined the movement at an early age, belonging first of all to the youth organisation and subsequently to the

Party. In '31 he'd lost his job, but he hadn't minded much as he'd then been able to devote himself exclusively to the work of the Party, soon becoming secretary of a sub-district. When the nazis seized power he went underground, but continued his Party work, which, indeed, was now more important than ever, since it included frontier work. Up to this point all was going well, and the communications could be kept open, though it wasn't too easy: too many experienced comrades were getting caught precisely because they were experienced, and, therefore, were known of old.

On November 6, 1913, he was himself arrested. They were astonishingly well-informed about his activities. It was true, that a number of his fellow workers were nabbed earlier on, but they hadn't talked. They tortured him, but of course he said nothing. He racked his brains trying to work out where they could have got their information from. Two months later the answer was made clear to him. He had a girl, his wife to be exact, though they weren't legally married; they had lived together, and she was pregnant by him. It must have been she who betrayed him. This was made plain when he was confronted by her. Furthermore, she committed suicide shortly afterwards. She wasn't very intelligent, it was true, and she wasn't even particularly beautiful, but all the same he'd loved her. Why her of all people, and not some other girl with more intelligence, beauty and sense? A pointless question, of course. And why had he suddenly felt as though all the blood were drained from his body when he heard that she was dead, that she'd taken her life in the garret they had shared? A few more months and the child would have been born. But there was no point in going on about that.

Yet it was then that an idea occurred to him: she knew far too little about his work to have been able to give them all the information that they possessed. It began to be an obsession with him. There was another traitor involved. Who was it? He couldn't work it out. Meanwhile the court treated him quite well, and he was only sentenced to two and a half years in jail, which wasn't so bad. From jail he attempted to renew his contacts with the Party; this was, of course, very difficult, since he was in solitary, but it should have been possible. It wasn't, despite the fact that there were other comrades in the prison block. He could never quite manage to communicate with them. So he settled down to wait for the two and a half years to be over. Two and a half years doesn't sound very long when you say it to yourself, but any man who's sat alone for that length of time . . . There's no point in going on about that. Everyone knows how it is.

Of course, they didn't set him free. They put him in a concentration camp, the same one Faber had been in. So there was no lack of comrades. For the first few days he was beaten to a pulp and then thrown into the underground punishment cell, so he couldn't do anything much. That was when he'd lost his eye. And they went on finding ways of keeping him away from the others, though they couldn't stop him having some contact with them. Looking back on it all now it was barely credible that at first he hadn't grasped what was going on, and that later he'd hardly been able to believe it: the comrades, even those he'd known well, even men whom he himself had brought into the Party, were avoiding him and wanted to have nothing to do with him.

'When you first see daylight after ten days in an underground cell, you're scarcely human. You're like some sort of animal, more wretched than the most wretched of dogs. If someone so much as calls you by your name you're ready to howl with gratitude and emotion. If someone just gives you a hand so as to make it a little easier for you to get to your part of the barracks, well . . . But there's no point in talking about that. Nobody called me by my name and nobody gave me a helping hand.'

The man fell silent and looked away. After a short pause, when he had calmed down, he began again.

He wasn't the only one they threw into underground cells and beat with their ox-hide whips at the slightest provocation. But it was obvious they'd decided to kill him. It sounded funny to say so, but he didn't care. Life meant very little to him any more. All the same he had to know – he had to make his way out of that dark tunnel and find out what had happened and why he found enemies even where he had expected to find friends. Then there was the business about the rope and his escape. Perhaps Faber had heard about that already?

'Yes, but tell me again.'

He was in the underground cell once again. The whole complement of guards, together with their notorious commandant, were leaving to take over a new camp. Their replacements had already arrived. The old guards told him that before leaving they wanted to finish the job properly. They added that they didn't intend to leave their replacements the nuisance of dealing with him. That night one of them, who particularly hated him, came and threw him a length of cord. He said he'd be back in half an hour and he expected everything to be finished by then. If it hadn't been for that business with the comrades, he might indeed have hanged himself. He'd have known that the comrades outside would understand. But he couldn't die like this, with nothing

explained. A man can do his best to fight against the injustice of the enemy; the injustice of his own friends simply destroys a man in shame. Which was why he couldn't die that way.

Needless to say there was no light^c in his cell, but he had grown accustomed to the darkness. He made a dummy out of his clothes and everything else there was in his cell, and strung it up. He stood naked, behind the door and waited. At last the S.S. man came. He was drunk, and grunted with satisfaction when he saw the hanging dummy.

'We've got you at last, you bastard!'

It was quite easy to get him to the ground, strangling was harder and disagreeable. It all took a terribly long time. He had to take off his uniform, dress him in the concentration camp clothes and hang him up. Then – all in the dark – he had to dress himself up in the uniform and put the boots on. The most difficult part turned out to be the simplest, since the new guards were in the camp and the old ones didn't know them by sight. Lurching he made his way through all the check points and just walked out of the camp. He held up a car and got the driver to take him to the Dutch frontier. He crossed it before first light. He walked and walked and walked, with his eyes shut part of the time, until he reached a little town. Day was beginning to break when he arrived. It was all so peaceful, so much like coming home. He sat down on the steps to get his breath back. The pastor found him there and took him into his home. He told him everything, and then the pastor helped him on his way.

'Wouldn't you like to have something to eat, Albert?'

'You're too late, Faber. The pastor helped me first and asked questions afterwards. No offence meant! Let me go on. Everything I've said so far is quite unimportant.'

So now he was at liberty and the pastor had procured him papers. He still had to find his way out of the tunnel and discover what it was that had come between him and the Party. They wouldn't find it so easy to avoid him now. All the same it took him a little time to re-establish contact. The uninitiated believed that he was out of his mind, quite simply crazy. But the responsible comrades, they knew: yes, there'd been an enquiry on him, which had started just before he was arrested. He'd been accused of dangerous deviationism from the line, of treacherous dealings with the social democrats, and of exaggerating the nazi menace to the workers' movement. It was true that in the meantime the Party line had been changed and that at the moment co-operation with the social democrats in a popular front against fascism was the order of the day, but all the same it had been a deviation

at the time. And the comrades in prison and in the concentration camp had, of course, known that he was in bad odour for some reason or other. That was why they'd avoided him. Surely he could understand that?

So he came out of the tunnel. It was laughable that he should have been made to suffer the way he had because of a deviation which had, meanwhile, become the general line. So far so good. There remained the question as to who had committed the original treachery. He told the people of the apparatus that his girl, Erna, had indeed talked out of turn, but she could not have been responsible for the more important betrayals, since she hadn't known the facts. They had replied that everything would be investigated in due course: the enquiry about his own activities had not yet been closed, and there was still a considerable amount to be cleared up. It would have to be decided, in due course, whether he had not perhaps been careless and thus betrayed himself. Meanwhile he was to remain silent; as an old comrade he would understand the importance of preserving discipline and order. Finally, there was the matter of the murdered S.S. man and of his escape. It is true that it had been in the papers, and was not a bad thing in itself – the Party had even taken trouble to see that the story got the maximum publicity. All the same, and looked at from another angle, he had really had no right to commit such an action without a direct order from the Party to do so. Which was another reason why he should keep silent.

Very well, then: discipline, order and silence. He managed illegally to get a job in a garage. There was no hope of his getting a legal work permit. He read and thought a great deal, and gradually and carefully made a number of contacts. Through them he learned that Erna had killed herself after being visited by a comrade who had since emigrated, one Josmar Goeben. He smuggled himself across the frontiers, first the Belgian and then the French, and finally reached Paris where he found this Goeben. At first the latter refused to talk, but after a while he gave in. Yes, he recalled the whole incident exactly. He had been given the job of enquiring into what had happened, and he had indeed been to see Erna Lüttge. She had been in poor shape physically, and had vomited repeatedly. She had admitted to him that she had been a traitor and that she'd told everything to her friend Else whose husband was a Gestapo agent – she'd done it out of stupidity and a desire to have somebody to talk to. On the other hand, she'd kept the papers in safety and had only handed them over to him, Goeben, together with the accounts of the Party funds.

“‘Goeben,’ I said to him. ‘You undertook that enquiry on Soennecke’s orders, and were therefore in a position to question anyone. You knew that my wife had talked, and you also knew that she wasn’t the principal traitor. So who was it? For God’s sake are you all in a conspiracy not to tell the truth?’ Then he said that to begin with, immediately after the enquiry, he had been of the opinion that it was Erna who’d betrayed me. ‘And afterwards?’ I asked him. ‘What do you mean – afterwards?’ he replied, blushing like a young girl. And that was that. He closed up like an oyster. He knew nothing more, he insisted, and he had no more to say.’

So he wasn’t out of the tunnel after all. He was still feeling about in the dark. There were plenty of comrades in Paris who knew him from the old days, and he talked to one or two of them, but it was no good. He made up his mind to go back to the garage in Amsterdam, where he could earn his living without being dependent on anyone. Besides, there was still the enquiry about himself that was pending. Things had reached that point, and he was about to leave, when he was summoned to meet a man – a very important man indeed, he was told. As it turned out there were two of them, of whom one spoke only Russian, though he appeared to understand German. And this was the sensational part of his story. They knew everything and they kept nothing back. Erna, of course, was not responsible for the betrayal: it was a man who had enjoyed the Party’s greatest trust, a secret and, therefore, all the more dangerous enemy, a fantastically subtle double-crosser: Herbert Soennecke.

‘So now I must ask you again, Faber. Are you a friend of Herbert Soennecke?’

Doino gazed at him for a long time. He thought: ‘So you’re the black angel I’ve been waiting for. You’ve come at last, black angel, and now you ask me the question. My answer is ready, and has been for a long time. You’re trying to find a way out of your tunnel. Instead, you’re throwing me into an abyss!’

‘You don’t answer. Have I still not the right to ask questions, Faber?’

‘You have the right, Albert. I didn’t know that this was the case with Soennecke....’

‘What do you mean by that?’

‘I didn’t know that the people over there had decided to eliminate him.’

‘Be careful, Faber, be very careful. You mean you don’t believe Soennecke’s guilty?’

‘No. With every fibre of my being I believe that Soennecke with

every fibre of his being has always been a true comrade and a true leader – a finer one doesn’t exist.’

They told him that Soennecke had been a traitor, and that wasn’t all. They told him about worse crimes that he had committed whenever he’d had the opportunity. His dealings with the enemy dated from a long time back. He had come to terms with the Nazis before ever they had got to power. This explained why all his fellow workers had been arrested sooner or later while only he, allegedly the most sought-after of them all, had consistently escaped the net. Why had Soennecke handed him, Albert Gräfe, over to the Gestapo? Because Gräfe did his work too well, that was why. And because Soennecke had sold himself to the Gestapo body and soul. On another occasion Soennecke had compelled a comrade to put a bullet through his brains because of being friendly with Jochen von Ilming. But Soennecke himself had been in contact with Ilming and had slept in his house. The leaders had long had their suspicions about Soennecke, but always came up against a wall of sentimentality: good old Herbert, the old Spartakus fighter, the friend of Rosa Luxemburg, the man of whom Lenin is alleged to have said: ‘He’s the best man in the German Party.’ But that was not true. It wasn’t Lenin who said it; it was Trotsky.

Not satisfied with destroying him, Albert Gräfe, Soennecke sent one of his men to kill Albert’s wife. Was it pure coincidence that on the very evening of the man’s visit to the poor woman she should, deliberately driven to despair, make away with herself? The word for that is murder. Soennecke then set about covering his tracks and concealing his crime. In this he failed. The G.P.U. had found out a considerable amount about this murder, as about many other things. But this was a particularly instructive incident which the whole world would understand. And it was now up to him, Albert, to help in clearing the business up once and for all. The enquiry into his own activities would naturally be quashed, since the whole thing was based on one of Soennecke’s frauds. He was to make a written declaration in which he stated that he, his wife and his sub-district had been smashed thanks to Soennecke’s criminal-fascist activities. He would eventually be needed at the Moscow trial: meanwhile he was to broadcast the truth at public meetings and thus finally stop the mouths of the doubters and enemies here abroad.

‘Yes, that’s what they told me. And do you know what I replied, Faber? To everything they said, I answered, “Hear, hear!”’

‘No, it’s not possible. It’s insane.’

‘Quite. That’s what I said to myself later that night. I woke up and I

suddenly realised that I was out of the tunnel, once and for all. I was supposed to play the part of the victim once again, while the criminals remained the same. No, Soennecke was innocent. He was a proper comrade. And those two, they were the foulest, lowest sort of policemen. So then and there I slipped out of my hotel. I hung about in Paris hiding for a few days until I got the reply from Norway. Then I changed my name once again and came here. Since that night I haven't talked to a single comrade. I've been waiting. Yesterday I read a placard about your coming here to lecture. You're a friend of Soennecke's. So I'm not alone any more.

'What was it you were waiting for? What do you expect me to do?'
'For God's sake don't pretend you don't know.'

Yes, here was the black angel right enough, and there was no use in trying to ignore him. On the other hand, the Soennecke story was no different, no more shocking than the other ones. Soennecke had kept silent as he himself had kept silent; so why should he speak up now? And how could a man like this Albert Gräfe guess how hard silence can be?

'You're taking your time about answering. Well and good. You can order me something to eat now, if you like. While I'm eating you'll have a chance to sort your ideas out.'

Albert cut his bread up into little pieces, which he put slowly into his mouth one by one. While he chewed laboriously – during the interrogations they'd knocked out more than half his teeth – he gazed out over the fjord. The hardest part was over; whether or not a new road lay ahead of him he did not yet know for sure. In any case, he was no longer in the dark, and his loneliness could certainly not become more complete. At first he had had strange hopes, deceptive illusions that verged on insanity; then he would think that everything was untrue, a nightmare in which he dreamed that he lost all he possessed, wife, mother, home, the Party which was the only true hope that held any meaning for him – and that in this nightmare he had lost all that through no fault of his own, or of anyone else. 'Such a thing cannot happen,' he used to say to himself in the days when he was still affected by these illusions, 'such a thing cannot be. A man either dies or he goes on living. No man dies and yet survives his death simply in order to learn the misery and humiliation of his end.'

That was at the very beginning. It only lasted a few weeks. Then he gained control of himself again. Almost as soon as he started work in the garage he found his real place in a real world once more.

'You must realise, Faber, that when I was in the Gestapo cellars and

afterwards in prison and in that underground cell, though I might be alone, I wasn't lonely. How could I have been, since I didn't understand what the word meant? Only when everyone on whom you depend has deserted you, only when you've left the Party, can you realise what true loneliness is. It's worse than being paralysed in every limb and having to beg despairingly for each drop of water. Yes, it's like that. I know. And now it's time you spoke. Are you going to be brave enough to take the necessary steps? Will you tell the world in your speech tomorrow the sort of man Soennecke is, - with every fibre of his being, were those your words? Will you tell them what's happened, and about the crime that they are preparing to commit against him?

'Listen to me carefully, Albert. . . .'

'A bad start. You want to get out of it.'

'Wait. Listen to me. You can say later on whether I want to get out of it or not. But think. Suppose I wanted to get out of it? Why should I give you my reasons for doing so? What rights have you over me, you? The right of having been victimised? The world is crammed with victims, and they're about as interesting as last year's dance tunes. Furthermore . . .

'So you do want to get out of it. Faber. You're trying to conceal your cowardice behind brave gestures,' Albert interrupted him.

'You're wrong. I'm not frightened of loneliness. Since the trials began I've become accustomed to it. So that has nothing to do with it. But just think. What hope is there other than the hope that first attracted us to the Party and to Russia? You've brought people to the Party, and so have I. They broke with their past, their friends, their families - all for the sake of that hope which we inspired in them. What should we say to them if we were now to abandon it and declare it to be a fraud or, worse perhaps, a poisonous parody of its own truth? What have we to offer them in its place? Your loneliness or mine? And in Hitler's world, at the very moment when the decisive test is being fought in Spain? You didn't think it excessive when you were asked to risk your own life and that of your comrades for the Party. Soennecke never hesitated for a single second to offer his and those of his friends. Is it then too much to sacrifice Soennecke's honour, mine, yours, yes, our feeling for justice itself, for the sake of the Party? Remember that at this moment of history our readiness to make sacrifices must be as complete as the danger that we are struggling to overcome.'

'Valencia!'

'You're referring to the unfortunate business of the Polish comrades in Valencia? That was . . .'

'Balls! I'm talking about an old popular song called *Valencia*. The words were obviously rubbish, but I enjoyed listening to it. So did everybody else. The little factory girls who hadn't had enough to eat since the war would roll their eyes at the very mention of *Valencia*. And what you're saying is nothing other than straight *Valencia*. By the way, if you've enough money you might order me another sandwich and some more coffee. And tell the girl to switch the lights on. I've had enough of this white night. For my money the day and the night should be divided from one another. Don't you agree?'

'Yes, I do. But tell me why it's *Valencia*.'

'I shall. The Party you're talking about, and the Soviet Union you're so proud of just don't exist any more. Look at it this way. Would a proper proletarian party ever hand a man like me over to the police? And would it ever have to dishonour and kill a man like Soennecke? A Party that finds itself compelled to do that sort of thing isn't our party any more, and that's all there is to it. Nowhere else in the world have so many communists been killed as in Russia. Don't get me wrong now, I'm not worrying about Albert Gräfe at the moment. Not a bit. Here, take my revolver. It's loaded and the safety catch is off. All you have to do is pull the trigger. I don't care if you shoot me dead here and now, and believe me that's not *Valencia*, but it must be for the cause. And the cause is the freedom of the working man, justice for the working man, and the honour - yes, I'll repeat that - the honour of the working man.'

The scene was becoming extremely painful. Albert stood there, waving the revolver in his hand, his voice cracked as though he were drunk, and shouted:

'Honour, dignity if you like. Perhaps that's the word I should have used. Dignity, Faber, dignity!'

At last he sat down again and Doino took the revolver away from him.

'And that's something you'll never understand, Faber. You're no proletarian. A working man doesn't become a revolutionary for the sake of butter or even of bread to put it on. In America, when there's not actually a slump going on, the workers have plenty of bread and marge and a radio and even three evenings a week at the movies, and hot water to wash their dishes in and for shaving, and an electric frying-pan for all I know. Tomorrow they may all have their own cars and houses and what have you. But there's one thing the capitalist

can't give the worker: honour and dignity. The nazis have murdered plenty of us, but that was only an incidental part of their terror programme; what they've really been aiming at, since the very first day, is to beat the dignity out of us. I've heard them talking about the honour of a nation or a race, and they've tried to explain to all intelligent workers how his leaders are cheats and incompetents, swindlers. Do you realise what it would mean to the German workers if they were compelled to believe that Soennecke was a crooked swine who'd sold and betrayed them - Herbert Soennecke who was always up in front there and who we guarded with our bodies? His honour doesn't belong to him. It belongs to the German workers, and they . . .'

'Yet you told the G.P.U. men in Paris you'd witness against him!'

'Yes, I did. I did it because I was stunned for the moment, and because, well, I couldn't help thinking of that poor girl, Erna, in her garret. And because somehow it's easier to think about a murdered person if you know the murderer's name. And because I felt that here was a chance to stop being so lonely, here was a way open that led back into the Party. But a few hours later that night I saw it all, I saw through their scheme. Hitler said that if a lie is monstrous enough people will believe it. No one would dare to pretend that Soennecke was a traitor. That is why it was such a stunning blow when those fellows came and told me he was one. If with a trick like that they can persuade a man like me for several hours, think how easy it'd be for them to fool the French and English and Yugoslavian workers - and thus debase them. For once a man has swallowed a lie like that one, there are no limits left. He'll swallow everything, and vomit it all up against as his own condemnation to death.'

'Well, yes,' Doino said. 'But it may be that it's not all quite as simple as you think. In any case, so far as Soennecke's concerned he has two choices. He can either agree to play his part in an open trial, the way the old bolsheviks did, and in that case there's nothing that we people here can do for him. His words would be believed before ours. Or, if he refuses, then they'll kill him without any more ado. If we make a fuss it won't make any difference. You must see that. Whatever else they may do to him, Soennecke still has the final choice.'

Doino had scarcely uttered these words before he experienced a curious sensation of physical discomfort which did not seem to be localised in any particular part of his body. It grew stronger when Albert got up and said, without looking at him:

'I see. I see it all quite clearly, Faber. There are two alternatives, either one of which amounts to your condemning him to death. In

either case you'll keep your head up and your normally wide-open mouth shut.'

'Wait! Don't go away like this. We must meet again tomorrow, whenever you like, down in the town.'

'No thank you. No point. Give me back my revolver.'

Doino saw him speak to the waitress and hurried over, but Albert insisted on paying for what he had eaten and drunk himself. He hadn't enough money, he found, and didn't know what to do. Then he remembered a book of unused bus-tickets and he pressed that into the waitress's hand. She wouldn't take it.

'Keep your money and your tickets. Pay me next time you're up. I trust you.'

Albert thanked her embarrassedly in a mixture of Norwegian and German. He even blushed. Doino put his hand on his shoulder and said:

'Albert, you mustn't treat me like this. You can't just go away.'

'So far as not paying my bill, yes, I daresay I've done the wrong thing. Unfortunately I have no choice in the matter. As for going away, I think you'll admit, Faber, that that is one of the few actions in the world that I can still perform. In the end my freedom will still have a certain value for me . . . I'll be able to go away.'

2

The next day Doino searched the town in vain. He looked into garages and ironmongers' workshops; he thought he might find him in the dock area; he went to cheap restaurants and reading rooms, public libraries and the parks.

If he had found him he would have talked to him about himself, explaining who he was and where he came from and where he wanted to go. In the afternoon he gave up looking; indeed, he was already beginning to forget him. Before delivering his lecture he had to see one or two people from the Party, and he had arranged to meet some old friends later on. Finally, he intended to spend a little time with some writers, members of the club that was sponsoring his lecture. From time to time during the course of these various conversations, Doino felt the need to refer to Albert, if only indirectly, so as to convince himself that the latter was not just a figment of his own imagination. Sometimes, in the middle of a sentence, he would stop talking. It was as though Albert had suddenly risen up before him, and

by his presence had made it impossible for him to go on saying such stuff. *Valencia!*

The small and elegant lecture hall was completely full. The men and women there had open, clever faces, and it would be easy to speak to them. His subject was an old one, but vital enough, since it dealt with the responsibilities of intellectuals in view of fascism and the war that threatened. Doino had chosen as his title *The Lost No-Man's Land*, and he intended to prove that it was no longer possible to be neutral and that no man was free any longer to avoid taking up a position or even to choose his enemy.

As always, he improvised, thinking aloud as though he were arguing with an imaginary opponent as intelligent as himself. An audience may become confused when it hears a speaker expounding his opponents' point of view so convincingly; but when it realises that he has retained the best arguments for his own cause, it listens to the interplay of ideas with pleasure, knowing itself to be on the winning side. The women were moved by the occasional huskiness of his voice; the men, particularly the younger ones, appreciated the way he treated them as being at least his equals in knowledge. His watch lay in front of him, and he intended to speak, as usual, for fifty minutes. He was already more than half-way through. He had talked about Germany and Spain. The first phase of the civil war was over, the second just starting. There was more at stake there than just Spain itself, which had become a testing ground. Hence the presence of Russian tanks and Soviet flyers in the Iberian peninsula. At this point he was heckled for the first time.

'Late enough, too. Three months earlier and Franco's goose would have been cooked.'

He answered briefly and without polemics. Then he returned to the subject of Germany, speaking of an anti-fascist writer who had managed to flee the country and whose two young children had in consequence been seized by the Gestapo as hostages. This story made a visible impression on the audience. He was about to go on and tell of the urgent need for a protest, when suddenly it happened. Starting from his heart a sensation of weakness, such as he had never previously experienced, enveloped him. He clutched at the lectern, but he soon realised that his voice had lost all carrying power and had become weak and hollow. He broke off, as though starting back from the edge of a precipice, for the sentence he was about to say – and which bore no reference to his previous remarks – was ready formed on the tip of his tongue. It was: 'Soennecke's two children are in Russia. So he has no freedom of choice.'

After an interval of ten minutes, during which time he was brought a large glass of milk that he drank, he felt his strength had returned. Minor cardiac trouble, that was all it was. He started again at the point he had broken off, listening to his own words with care, but he soon realised that no mere organic complaint could make his voice sound so hollow and feeble. He would never be able to speak convincingly on such a subject again; his voice would not permit it. He finished normally enough; the break in the middle had had the effect of making his listeners more than ever moved by what he had said. Both friends and strangers urged him to look after himself, for the sake of the cause if for no other reason. He was driven back to his hotel and accompanied to his room. A young girl brought him flowers and even offered to stay the night and look after him if he felt he needed her. He reassured her.

A little later he went out again. It was a pointless undertaking, since only by the most remarkable coincidence could he hope at that late hour to run across a man of whom he knew neither the address nor the name which he was using. In the houses he passed only an occasional light still burned. He stopped in front of each of them and called softly, 'Albert', or his own name, 'Faber', once, twice, three times. He looked for him in station waiting-rooms, in the dock area, in Salvation Army hostels. About two o'clock it came on to rain. Now he might well have gone back to his hotel, for he was tired, but he went on, pacing through the streets and along the narrow alleyways. He was soon soaked through, for he had no overcoat and the rain ran down the back of his neck, while his shoes squelched with every step he took. He thought constantly of the man for whom he was looking, yet bit by bit that thought sank further back in his consciousness. Feelings, slight at first, increased in power over him, dragging him far away, summoning up distant memories. There was a tall man from time to time squeezing out his long, white beard, so that the water ran down on to the clay floor. Why was the beard wet? Because the man had just come from the ritual bath and had not had time to dry it properly. He was the teacher who instructed the boy, then barely seven years old, in Hebraic texts and the translation of the *Song of Songs*, to which were added the commentaries, orally preserved. Without them it would all have remained incomprehensible to the child: the lament of a woman, wandering by night through the streets, searching for her lover to whom she has done an injury. From time to time she stops a passer-by to ask him about her lover. At last she reaches the locked gates of the city. There the guardians of the gate make mock of her and of her

lover, whom nobody has ever seen. And the guards will beat her and their drunken shouts will waken the sleepers so that they too may learn how senseless is the woman's love quest. Yet what do the guardians know and what the sleepers? The teacher with the long, white beard explained it all to the little boy, greedy for knowledge: the woman in love, that is the people of Israel searching for the God to which they have been unfaithful, searching for their deliverer. And the night in the *Song of Songs*, that is not the time between sunset and sunrise, but a century, a thousand years, even longer. The night is the age of man before the deliverance. 'And don't let it worry you, my boy, that the guardians should mock her. They belong to the world of might. With the dawn their sorrow and their destruction will begin.'

'And that,' thought Doino, as he wandered aimlessly again in the direction of the Royal Palace, 'that is the story of the night, and the jeering guards who are conscious of their strength, and the lost and unloved woman. For the old man it had all been quite clear, since he knew that one day his dawn must break; otherwise what would be the sense of the long, long night? "Perhaps this is the very last hour," he used to say: "For there are signs enough and more than enough that the dawn is coming."'

'I must write to Stetten again,' he suddenly thought. 'From the lower road, on the way back to Damascus, Saul sends greetings!' Or: 'There is a man here called Albert who despises me. I cannot live under the awful shadow of his contempt. Telegraph me what to do.'

'If the firmament of heaven were made of parchment – and all the trees were pens – ah! another commentary by the old man with the white beard – and if the seas were filled with ink and every inhabitant in the world wrote day and night to justify me to Albert, it would weigh less than a feather in the balance. For on the other side of the scales would be the silent accusation of his anguish, and the guilt that his poor, blind eye has uncovered in my heart.'

It had stopped raining. Down in the harbour a ship's siren blew and another answered it. The whiteness of the northern night would soon be tinted by the first rays of the sun and would assume a pretence of daylight. It was time he was getting back to his hotel.

There was only one more thing to do. Quickly he wrote a letter:

My dear Karel:

I understand you're going to Paris tomorrow for five days. So this letter should reach you there. I have an urgent request to make, more urgent than I can say in a few words.

Please arrange all the details immediately so that I can go to Spain, to the front, as an ordinary soldier. Let me emphasise the fact that I don't want to be a commissar, or to work in the propaganda department, or to make any use of my seniority in the cadres. I just want to be an ordinary private soldier. I shall be travelling via Esbjerg-Dunkirk and shall arrive in three days' time. I'll be looking for you that evening at the usual place.

He took the letter to the nearest post office. On his way back he was once again overcome with weakness and had difficulty in getting up to his room. He opened the doors that let out on to the balcony, sat down in an armchair, and began to breathe deeply and carefully. Brave gestures to conceal cowardice. That's what Albert had said. Prodigality to conceal avarice. The days left to live are numbered now. This is number one. Might as well sleep through it.

CHAPTER II

I

VES, there he was, standing by the gangplank, the inevitable toothpick between his teeth. He might easily have been taken for a local man, the owner of a dock-area café perhaps, who was in the habit of wasting a quarter of an hour from time to time in walking a few yards along the quays to gape at an incoming ship. Thus did Karel fit into every landscape and every situation. Wherever he was he seemed equally at home; on the shore of the gulf of Cattaro, in a peasant's hut in Bosnia, at an expensive London hotel, in the offices of certain South American newspapers or the corridors of the French Chamber of Deputies or a smoke-filled Viennese coffee house, in inaccessible Moscow government departments or encircled Qyedo or, as now, on the quayside at Dunkirk.

'Let me take your suitcase. You don't look well. We're leaving right away. My car's here. I borrowed it for the day.' Karel led Doino over to a large, sky-blue limousine.

'It's very good of you . . .'

'It is indeed. You've no idea the trouble I had getting exactly this beautiful shade of blue. I wanted a colour that would suit your soul. In the brief-case in the back you'll find a thermos and some rolls. I

couldn't remember whether you preferred brioches or croissants, so I bought some of each. We'll have to eat as we go. We're driving straight to Rouen where I've got some things to do.'

After a while:

'Coffee all right? Made it myself according to Mara's recipe. You see, I remembered you saying once - that was three days before they killed Andrei - that she made the best coffee you'd ever tasted. Besides, I wanted to remind you that dead men don't drink coffee.'

'Can I leave for Spain this week?'

'No. Not this week nor next week either. In fact never. Even you aren't allowed to use a civil war as an excuse for suicide. We'll talk about all that later.' This is the first time I've driven over this road. I can't learn it by heart if we talk. Put the things back in the brief-case. It amuses me to think of people opening it with intense curiosity and finding nothing but those commonplace things inside. That's one of my favourite jokes. I've very few jokes, particularly when I'm with you, Doino.'

2

It was a sort of luxury suite, the pride of the hotel. Karel had reserved it by telegram from Paris.

By the time Karel came back from completing his business it was already late.

'Now then. We can talk. That is to say I'll do the talking and I'll try my best to stop you from saying anything. This is the last conversation we'll ever have together, and it goes without saying that it'll be a complete waste of time. It'll amount to "last words", and as Vasso once told you in Prague, it's the Karels who always have the last word, and never the Doinos and the Vassos.'

'How do you know Vasso said that?'

'He told me himself, not very long ago, when we were sharing a cell for a while - in Moscow. He kept on trying to prove that he'd foreseen everything that was happening. He also prophesied that I'd be set free and given an even more important job. As you can see he hit the bull's-eye there. But don't ask me about Vasso just yet. We'll keep him for later.'

'Is he still alive?'

'Irrelevant question. As irrelevant as whether you're still alive.'

'You came to meet me at the port. You drove me here. You won't let me go to Spain. So it must have some relevance for you.'

'I had to come up here in any case – to buy a ship from Danzig with a cargo of German arms for Spain. I succeeded in pulling it off. You made it worth my while for me to go a bit out of my way. You know, I've always been fond of the pair of you, Vasso and yourself. I remain true to death, even if the death should have to be my doing. When it comes out about my seeing you here, it'll count – on the day they decide to break me. And I'm one of the very few people, four to be exact, who know how near that day is. All the others are busy licking my arse. My God will there be a stampede for the door on that day.'

'And you're prepared to wait for it, quite calmly?'

'Calmly? I literally fill my pants every time I receive instructions summoning me to Russia. And even here, abroad, I need the strongest barbiturates before I can get to sleep. Sometimes my hands *and* my feet tremble. You know me. I've never been a coward. All the same, I can't bear the idea of being killed by my own people. It's become an obsession with me, you see, a stupid one too. And don't forget that that can happen just as easily in Spain – there are plenty of corpses to prove it. Funnily enough, when I'm in Spain it's not diarrhoea I suffer from, but constipation. How do you account for that psychologically?'

'I thought you didn't want me to talk. Tell me why I can't go to Spain.'

'I just told you. On account of the diarrhoea, I mean the constipation.'

'That's your trouble, Karel, not mine. They won't mind my dying at the front.'

'The question of who is to die a hero's death at the front is decided by the Party, or, to put it more bluntly, for the time being by us, the Karel's. So far as you are concerned, you've lost your right to such a death. In the first place there are your papers, among others your comic *Testimony of a False Witness*. You left eleven days ago. For the past ten we've been in possession of all your manuscripts; so you see we've been both discreet and patient. Then there's your meeting with that crazy Albert Gräfe and your whole Oslo pantomime. But to tell the truth all that is secondary. You're automatically under suspicion, simply because you're the sort of man you are. You were a friend of Vasso and Soennecke and Pal, and in fact you were concerned with all the oppositionists. When old bolsheviks, the founders of the International, are being executed for double-crossing, I'd like to know by what right you, whose middle name is duplicity, can expect to be spared or even granted a hero's death with lengthy obituaries and funeral honours. Of course, you can always put your head in a gas-oven like an ageing servant-girl who's been seduced by a crook and

swindled out of her life savings. As a matter of fact, substituting politics for sex, I swear that's exactly what's happened to you."

'Not bad, Karel, not bad at all. . . . In fact, it's a remarkably good parallel.'

'Look here, Doino, you pay me a small compliment and I blush with pleasure. What power the Vassos and Doinos might have had over the Karel's! And look what you've done with it. You've made us into your executioners, servants of a super-Karel.'

'How do you know about my meeting with Albert Gräfe?'

'We took the trouble to have him supervised a bit. Out of curiosity, you understand. At first he did in fact slip out of our sight. But when he had that row with his friend, the minister . . .'

'What minister?'

'Do you mean to say he didn't tell you? What on earth did you talk about? When Gräfe was in Germany he became friends with a Norwegian comrade who thought no end of him. This man, now of course a member of the Norwegian Workers' Party, has meanwhile become an important politician and is at present a cabinet minister. When Gräfe left us he turned to his old friend, who at once sent him money and a passport, and invited him to stay. But Gräfe couldn't stick it there, since his friend couldn't see that Norway must immediately break off all diplomatic relations with Nazi Germany. Finally Gräfe proposed a compromise: the minister was to make a public protest and resign from the government. When the Norwegian wouldn't agree to this either, Albert Gräfe upped sticks and vanished. For a while he starved, and then he got part-time work in the docks. Three days a week was all he could manage, since he needed the rest of his time for reading and learning languages. He had better luck with you than with his minister. At least he persuaded you that you ought to go off and get killed.'

'Do you know about the Soennecke business?'

'Of course I do. That was the first case I had to deal with when they let me out of jail. My opinion from the beginning was that there should be a burial but no funeral, a corpse without a trial. But I didn't get you here to talk about Soennecke. It's your account that has to be settled, not his. I'll send down for drinks. We've only just started talking, and my mouth already feels as dry as a bone.'

Karel's negotiations with the waiter were protracted. Although it was only a question of choosing something pleasant to drink, by the time Karel had done the waiter knew that Karel was the vice-president of the largest tobacco combine in the Balkans, and that he was organising

an amalgamation with his biggest rival, of which Doino was the head. The waiter was bound to realise that they had their own reasons, namely publicity, for presenting him with two cartons of one hundred cigarettes each, but nonetheless he was delighted to accept them. Doino, observing this comedy with amusement, suddenly realised wherein the strength of the Karels and the super-Karels lay. Theirs' was the genius of the roundabout approach. They used vast means – and human beings to them were only a variety of means – and since they had to be infallible at all costs, they must be in a position to be able to make others bear the responsibility for their mistakes. During their long detours and oblique approaches they might lose sight of their objective, but it made no difference, since they were convinced that subtlety combined with power was more than a match for any hostile force.

Doino still had no idea what Karel was aiming at with these 'last words' of his. Karel liked him and genuinely wanted to save him, but with him what did salvation imply? And what man would dare allege that he could always exactly evaluate the stupidity of subtlety? There are no matches? Very well, then, we'll set fire to a couple of rows of houses. So long as they burn we won't need any matches. Besides, that way we can find out what the people who live there have hidden in their houses, in their attics and cellars. Furthermore, we'll tell the world that it's our enemies who started the fire in order to cover up their huge match swindle before we got a chance to expose it. Yes, and later on, the subtle people say, as soon as we've finally destroyed all our enemies, we'll set about making matches and building houses, new and better houses and more than enough of them. For the genius of the detour, new detours are always needed, until at last the genius is convinced that he himself is utterly irreplaceable.

The waiter brought the drinks and expressed his thanks once again. The conversation could go on.

'Lately I've found I enjoy drinking,' Karel began, leaning back in his armchair. 'You ask why? In the second place because I've become a coward, in the first place because nowadays I can afford to drink good stuff. Besides, women bore me more and more nowadays. There are reasons for that, of course. Was it you – or, wait a minute, who was it? – yes, it was you who spoke to me once about the Gorenko case. Liquidated recently. He admitted everything, even to stealing the sun from the workers of the world, or so I'm told, and selling it to the capitalists in exchange for a gold fountain pen or something of the sort. He went the whole hog. Women of course. Only a woman could have got a man like Gorenko to admit that he had only taken up the study

of biology in order to be able to poison the workers in a factory canteen with fish specially canned for that purpose in a village two thousand miles away. Yes, women. Every one of them's a potential copper's nark. What makes me say that? "Well, I'll tell you. It was the dear little girl between whose thighs you found some relief from your misery at observing the current cosmo-historical set-up who handed over your papers. There was very little difficulty in getting her to do so, just a few remarks about the cause of the world revolution. Wait a minute: I had a copy of one passage typed out. There you see, I carry your writing next to my heart." L. D. states repeatedly that J. V. has committed a serious offence against the Blessed Virgin, that he has debased her to the level of a gutter whore and has infected her with syphilis, gonorrhœa and leprosy. Nevertheless, L. D. declares that if only he could sleep just once with this utterly degraded trollop, her maidenhead would grow anew and her depravity be blotted out." And so on and so forth. Those imbeciles were racking their brains for minutes on end, until finally I had to explain to them the L. D. was Liev Davidovitch Trotsky, and that J. V. was the father of the peoples, the leader of the workers of the world, the greatest philosopher of all time, and furthermore – and among other things – the sun of the Tadshiks, in a word our Super-Super-Karel.

'So far so good. You don't believe in L. D.'s – what was your word? – ah, revirginisation. So what have you been waiting for? The old dialectical switch? When the whore's been in the cat-house long enough she'll become a virgin again, not due to L. D., but thanks to a Marxist miracle? Because, you see, you knew it all from the beginning, that the Soviets ceased to exist politically at a very early stage, that the Party stopped being a party, that the working class, instead of assuming control, simply lost all its rights. You knew that when super-Karel announced *ex cathedra* that the social democrats were social-fascists and the chief enemy it was plain madness and a sure indication of coming defeat. You recognised the trades union policy he laid down as being in blatant contradiction to every sensible appraisal of the facts – you knew all that and a great deal more as well. You wrote that a crooked line, becoming crookeder, was in fact a straight line. And you made no attempt to make it straight. Soennecke did nothing. Nor did Vasso. There were hundreds, maybe thousands, of you, and you gave in. You gave in, in silence, hundreds of times – and now, once at least, you'll have the privilege of dying in silence! I'm going to get them to send me up something to eat, otherwise I'll be really drunk. Is Normandy bacon any good?"

What was Karel getting at? Now for the first time he admitted that the Party line had been wrong, he who had always been such a staunch and uncompromising defender of the line. And the fact of his reproaching Soennecke and the 'Vassos and Doinos' for having always submitted in silence and not spoken up against it, that might be the sarcasm of a man frightened by the totality of his own success.

Karel wolfed down great mouthfuls of bacon. Suddenly he had all the mannerisms of a rich peasant, eating with redoubled, noisy enjoyment because a poor peasant, who had come to beg the loan of a horse for the next day, is watching him.

Finally he resumed his monologue. But he had got far away from his original subject. He brought up memories of the time when he was just a 'small technician'. Vasso had been a giant in those days, and he had had to stand on tiptoe to look up to him. Mara was a goddess, then, and the Party was an absolutely certain promise that a new life would soon begin, a life based on fresh, noble human beings, freedom, education and happiness for all.

'I could cry with homesickness when I remember those days, the time when you first came down and visited us. You were a young Viennese scholar, travelling to complete your studies. I thought you very handsome, but at that time all comrades looked handsome to me. In fact, you obviously never were good-looking. And to see you now, on the scrap-heap, and only even there because they've forgotten to clear you away — what connection have you with the young man who surprised and delighted us so? Can you tell me how it's happened that we're now here, in Rouen, trying to work out the most decent death for you and how I can fix it so that my own people won't kill me? It's all become one vast dungheap, and there's no talk of fresh, noble human beings any more. And in Russia they've just brought out a new slogan: *Live happily! Live gaily!* By a strange coincidence Goebbels has coined exactly the same slogan at the same time in Germany, I tell you, I just can't stop laughing about it all.'

The bacon hadn't worked and Karel was drunk. His face had gone blotchy and swollen; his nose now seemed too thick, and his wide, domed forehead was crimson. More and more often his left eye would wink. The rich peasant was soured and didn't care any more if his poor neighbour should see that he consisted of nothing but guile and cunning and should realise that he must be careful with this man. In any case, the knowledge wouldn't do the poor peasant any good.

'That man, Albert Gräfe, gave you his revolver up there in Oslo. I offer you mine. Shoot me if you like. I dug the graves for your best

friends. Shot in Rouen – doesn't sound bad, does it? A black angel, dead in Rouen. But I'm no black angel. I understand, I understand. They had to drag out Spennecke like a wild steer before he'd be shot? He wanted everyone in all the cells to know that a workers' leader doesn't let himself be bumped off as easily as all that. He bellowed: "Long live the oppressed workers of Russia and down with their bloody tyrants! Long live the oppressed workers of Germany and down with their bloody tyrants!" And after they'd broken his jaw and smashed his mouth in with their rifle butts, he went on shouting, though no one could understand the words. They say he screamed like an old man being beaten. It was funny to hear him, they said, like a bad piece of theatre.

'But when they took Vasso out to die he didn't scream. Dumb, with his schoolboy shoulders hunched up, he walked like a man suffering from the cold. It was the first time those warders had ever felt they didn't dare push a prisoner to make him go faster. But when Vasso fell dead, then there was a noise, though it wasn't a loud one. But it's never stopped. If I close my eyes I can still hear it. It's the noise of his head hitting the ground. You remember his head, Doino? And his face that was as beautiful with intelligence as a June morning?

'And when they led me out, and everything looked as though this was my last walk, my feet were like sawdust, like icy sawdust, and my knees were like cotton wool, and then all of a sudden I thought of how Slavko had made them saw through my right knee, and about how I'd broken with my family, and I'd never seen my elder sister again, and I always loved her so much, and suddenly I was angry, so angry that I nearly suffocated, and I was all set to take a swing at those bastards, and then I noticed that they were smiling. Why? Because it had been dribbling out of me all the time. I'd done it in my trousers, and I'd never even noticed. Ever since then I've had diarrhoea. I only have to think about it, and . . . '

'As for me,' thought Doino, 'my cowardice will be based on logic. Why cry out? To whom? Nothing makes any difference at all any more. And perhaps after all it's only a joke on the part of the guards, a mock execution. That's what I would think to begin with. I'd try to stand up straight, but it wouldn't work. There'd be the Hippocratic countenance, shrunken and livid. Perhaps I might suddenly be overwhelmed with pity for myself – a last spasm of pride, an attempt to stand outside myself, to despise myself and my murderers simultaneously. But that wouldn't work either.'

'I'd try to think of the little island and the sea, and a sailboat crossing

the little bay with white sails, pure white sails. Nothing but the blue sky, the blue sea, the gentle breeze, the tiny island with its two trees. And the sailboat crossing the bay. And then I'd close my eyes so the picture wouldn't disappear, and that way I might even fall asleep.'

He awoke. Perhaps it was Karel's snores that had awakened him. He was lying on the sofa, his head down, his feet up on the arm. With his left hand he grasped the edge of the table, and his right hand was clenched on his chest. It was an awakening like those in the concentration camp. His head was quite clear and there was no transition period between sleeping and waking, no residue of a dream trailing behind. Soennecke was dead, Vasso was dead, Pal and so many others were either dead or in exile.

* * *

'I'll sign nothing!' Soennecke shouted, touching his breast-pocket with his right hand to make sure his fountain pen was still there. 'Nothing! The man was sent us by the Russians and he had more power in the German Party than the rest of us put together. Even six months ago, at the conference, every one of the reports had to be submitted to him for approval. And now we're supposed to tell the world that he was our man, that it was due to our "inexcusable carelessness" that he rose to the top? Are you all crazy? I won't sign.'

'We've already sent the declaration off, with your name on it as usual, as well as our own,' said the permanent delegate, pushing his chair back, away from Soennecke.

'Then send a correction after it.'

'Herbert, you're heading for trouble. And dragging the rest of us with you.'

Sonnecke looked at them one by one. They'd all gone pale. As soon as he left the room there'd be a scramble for the telephone, each one anxious to be the first to denounce him and thus to prove his estrangement from him by damning him.'

He drove at once to the ball-bearing factory and went to find the German workers in the tool-shop. They wouldn't yet know that he was as good as dead, and he wanted to get one of them to put him up for the night so that he could write in peace and work out how best to reach the Latvian or Finnish frontier.

He hadn't noticed that one of the men had slipped out a few minutes before. Suddenly someone whispered:

'Sonnecke, get out of here right away. There's something going on. Hurry up, or we'll all be for it!'

It was a young workman he'd known in Berlin.

Then he stood in a queue for five hours to buy a ticket for Minsk. He went away with the others when it was announced that no more tickets would be sold. It was about two in the morning.

He wandered about the town and made his way out to the large park. At seven, a policeman stopped him and took him off to the police station on a charge of vagabondage. He had no papers on him. It took them two days to discover what a catch they'd made, and then they handed him over to the G.P.U. Twenty-seven days later the interrogation began. Everything was ready. All he had to do was sign. The others had signed already. There wasn't any time to waste. The trial was to start in twelve days. There was no use his attempting a denial. He had always been an enemy of the workers' movement and of the Soviet Union, despite his pretence at being a communist. Owing to the carelessness of the German Party he had wormed his way into the highest positions by fraud. Since 1923 he'd been a nazi agent. Later he'd been in permanent touch with the nazis through the Gestapo agent, Major von Klönitz, and also through Jochen von Ilming. On the orders of these latter he'd established contact with criminal elements in Russia of whom a number had already been condemned while others were awaiting trial. He had made many trips to Russia, always on forged papers. He had attempted to liquidate the German Party. Soennecke had handed Albert Gräfe and his comrades over to the Gestapo. He had liquidated Störte's important section. He had attempted to organise a faction among the German émigrés in Russia for the purpose of assassinating the leader of the Soviet Union. Witnesses for the prosecution: Irma Bellin, his former secretary and mistress; the writer, Max Kirchner; the fellow-accused, Pal Kovacs; Paul Heller (called Bärtchen); German workers from the tractor works in Kharkov, and from the ball-bearing plant in Moscow; and others. Needless to say, Karl and Klara Soennecke were under considerable suspicion, but no proceedings were being taken against them for the moment. They would even be allowed to change their names, provided their father realised the game was up and fulfilled his final duties towards the Fatherland of the Workers by signing the protocol immediately and thus saving time in the preparations for the trial. If he insisted he would be allowed time to think it over: namely, twenty-four hours.

The interrogation lasted for thirty-seven days, including two periods of four days without a break, the officials being frequently replaced. During these uninterrupted interrogations Soennecke was given plenty to eat but was not allowed to close his eyes.

The confrontation with Irma lasted some two hours. It was late at .

night. She wore a black fur jacket and a grey fur cap pulled down low over her forehead. Her statement was precise:

‘Citizen Soennecke informed me that through Major von Klönitz he had completed his entry into the Nazi party. Later he lived with Jochen von Ilming. With him he made full-scale plans aimed at the overthrow of the Soviet State and the victory of the Trotskyist-Bukharinist central group working in conjunction with Hitler and Hess. He told me about this for the first time on March 6, 1934. I wanted to have nothing more to do with him, so great was my horror and disgust, but in order to extract more secrets from him for the sake of the Party I determined to continue our relationship. Since, however, he was afraid that he had betrayed himself to me, and since my continued loyalty to the Party became increasingly irritating to him, he himself broke off our relationship approximately one year ago.’

‘Are you quite sure that’s everything, Irma? Are you sure you haven’t lied? Look at me and answer,’ asked Soennecke.

She looked at the official and said:

‘I have told the truth and the whole truth.’

‘Certainly, Comrade, certainly!’ the interrogating judge put in.

‘In that case, I have a statement to make and I insist that it be included in the protocol, word for word. I accuse the interrogating judge of deliberately concealing the true reasons for this woman’s accusations against me. The witness, Irma Bellin, has in her possession a Walter pistol with which she intends to kill Stalin, Voroshilov and Molotov at the first opportunity. She is making this accusation against me in order to gain time to prepare this crime. Irma Bellin is a Trotskyist agent who has probably inveigled the interrogating judge into complicity in her conspiracy, else doubtless he would otherwise have exposed it long ago.’

‘You’re crazy!’ the interrogating judge broke in, but Soennecke went on:

‘I insist on being taken before the advocate-general. First, however, this so-called witness must answer a question: Has she a pistol and ammunition concealed in her bedroom, or hasn’t she not?’

Irma broke down. She admitted having been a Trotskyist before she came under Soennecke’s influence. But since then, thanks to him, she had remained steadfastly true to the Party line. She was arrested.

The confrontation with Max Kirchner could not take place since he was in Spain and unavailable. He sent a long report in which he accused himself of having believed in Soennecke’s genuineness for too long. It

was therefore all the more his duty now to snatch the mask from the vile traitor's face. At the end of each paragraph he quoted a passage from the works of Stalin.

Bärtchen had a field day. He stated that for many years he'd seen through Soennecke, who had been a compromiser and an underminer of the Party in the interests of the social democrats. But the social democrats are the outposts of capitalism in the workers' movement. In the world crisis the shock troops of capitalism are the bloodstained fascists. Therefore, Soennecke was the most dangerous sort of fascist agent, a poisoned arrow in the heart of the German working class. And since the German working class, like all the other workers of the world, had no greater or surer friend than Stalin, it followed that the poisoned arrow, that is to say Herbert Soennecke, must be directed against Stalin personally. In the course of twenty minutes' talk, Bärtchen succeeded in producing no less than five such chain identifications. The conclusion was in each case the same: Herbert Soennecke was the most dangerous fascist in the world, and Bärtchen had warned the G.P.U. against him as long ago as the spring of 1934. Finally he made a statement on behalf of the German Communist Party, which wished to tender to Stalin, the Soviet Union and the G.P.U. the thanks of the German and of the international proletariat for the stamping out of poisonous serpents who, etcetera, etcetera. . . .

‘And they've all signed this declaration?’ Soennecke asked.

‘Yes, all!’

‘But it's written in a style that's recognisable as your own, Bärtchen. Your name is Paul Heller, isn't it? How do you account for the fact that you entered this country on a Czech passport bearing the name of Josef Holub?’

‘What a stupid question. We all travel on false papers.’

‘I see. I must request the Comrade Interrogating Judge to include that statement in the protocol. Also that I, the poisoned arrow, was the man who handed Paul Heller, alias Josef Holub, that false passport. With that in mind, what the witness has said about me casts a curious light on his loyalty to the Party. I must further request that this be included: The so-called witness had dealings with Jochen von Ilming as early as the year 1932 and after the latter's flight from Germany he saw a great deal of him in 1935 and 1936, allegedly on Party business. Finally I should like it established once and for all that the witness Paul Heller, as acting chief of the internal apparatus, was responsible for the handing over of Albert Gräfe and his people to the Gestapo. And also that when, on March 5, 1934, I condemned this crime and protested

vehemently against it, this same Paul Heller declared that he was prepared to accept full responsibility for what he had done.'

'That's not quite right,' the man with the little beard called out. 'It was an order from above. All I did was carry it out.'

The next day a new man took charge of the interrogation. He was clever and obviously experienced in political matters.

'Let's talk seriously, Comrade Soennecke. All this stuff about you being a nazi agent is not only nonsense but boring. All the same – if we decide we want it that way a few thousand newspapers will write that even when you were still in your mother's womb you were an agent for the unborn Hitler or the Mikado. All the cells of all the Communist Parties in the world would then pass a unanimous resolution condemning you, and the German one would be the strongest worded of them all. And intellectual fellow-travellers, lawyers, physicists, philosophers, doctors, writers, two or three clergymen – would say that from legal or philosophical or medical grounds you must have been an enemy of humanity. I only need to nod my head for some Germans to be brought in who'll swear that you harangued them to take part in an attempt on the life of you know who. And those are people who know who Herbert Soennecke is. But when a man is forced to devote all the sympathy of which he is capable to himself, then he'll commit any crime that seems to offer salvation. Take your daughter Klara, for example. Pretty, intelligent, a little conceited perhaps, wants to become a film actress, supposed to be going to marry a well-known film director – and then this business with you begins. What will you? Everyone must look after himself. She's turned out of her room and out of her school. The director suddenly remembers an urgent film he has to make about socialist cotton-wool in Central Asia. Nobody seems to know pretty Klara Gerbertovna any more, and she finds herself entirely alone. To be entirely alone in our country was already very dangerous in Dostoevsky's time. To be brief, Klara Gerbertovna is prepared to declare that you told her you'd rather see Hitler in the Kremlin than Stalin. Of course you never said anything of the sort. I quite realise that.'

'So let's be serious. I know what you are, and you know I know. You're an old revolutionary, and therefore, *ipso facto*, an opponent of the present régime. If the nazis had caught you and cut your head off we'd have renamed a medium-sized town, two very large sovkhos, three steel works, and at least one school in your honour, no to mention

an overall total of approximately two hundred and fifty streets that would now be bearing your name. So from a dialectical point of view the accusation based on your association with Klönitz is quite correct. Had it not been for him you'd have been rubbed out in 1933, and today the Soviet Metal Trust would be running a Soennecke-Sanatorium on the Black Sea. But as it happens you are a live opponent, so we must make you harmless, which you'll admit is logical, either by killing you or by sending you to the north-east with an initial sentence of twenty years. You're not compelled to serve your twenty years. You can die after twenty months, and there's no place in the world where dying's easier. Believe me, I've just come back from there. So we'll have a trial and you'll agree that you're an opponent of the régime, not, of course, a theoretical, abstract opponent, but a pleasantly concrete one. All done by means of chain-identification, and splendidly dramatised. You won't say: "I'm against Stalin." You'll say: "I wanted to kill Stalin." Not: "I regard his politics as bad, destructive and counter-revolutionary", but, concretely and directly, "I conspired with the scum of the earth to overthrow the Soviet government", and so on and so forth. No one will ask you why you, an old revolutionary, should have become an opponent, since it will have been clearly established already that you never were a revolutionary, and so on. Everything clear so far, Gerbert Karlovitch?

'Quite clear. Only I won't play. I'll say during the trial why I believe that every step you've taken since 1927, despite your five-year plans and your collectivisation, has been away from the revolution and from socialism and towards an Asiatic tyranny, and that . . .'

'Wait a minute, wait a minute. You're getting away from the point. Since 1927 you've recognised our policy as being wrong, yet you've applied it without in any way opposing it. True or false?'

'True.'

'And you continued to do so to the very day you were arrested. True or false?'

'True.'

'And in carrying out that policy you sent men into battle, into prison, to concentration camps, even to death. True or false?'

'True.'

'And now, for the sake of that policy, it is necessary that yet another comrade should die. This time it happens to be you who are the one. And all of a sudden it strikes you there's something wrong. Thousands of comrades have died already. That doesn't matter. But the life and honour of Comrade Soennecke are far more important than all that.'

So all of a sudden you discover that there's something wrong with the whole business.'

'Nonsense. Every man who fought under me knew that no one, not even the enemy, could deny that he was fighting for a cause that he'd chosen of his own free will. It was as fighters for freedom that they went to prison, to the camps, or to death. But you're asking people to die in shame, under the assumed epithet of counter-revolutionaries.'

'A weak argument, very weak, since it's based on formal logic. Besides, you're getting away from the point again. The Party makes mistakes, many and serious mistakes. The consequences become apparent, since it's impossible to hide hunger or cold or shortages of seed-grain, draught animals or tractors, and it's impossible to conceal defeats. But can the Party make mistakes, can it be sullied by defeat? No, the Party must always be right, for the Party is everything, the Trinity, the Church, the Saints and the Miracles. It must be all that or else it's lost. Which is why it must remain unsullied, a light in the darkness as the good book puts it. And to keep it clean there's need of fresh water and good soap, of Soenneckes in fact. Afterwards the water's dirty, but the Party's clean. Under what epithet a man dies for it is utterly unimportant.'

'You worked all this out for yourself - up there in the north-east? Quickly, before your twenty months were up?'

'Yes. It's dialectical.'

'Not bad, not bad at all. So those people who have made a mistake in the name of the Party have to assume the guilt, call themselves counter-revolutionaries, and turn up their toes, so that the Party may stay clean - firm, but just. I've made mistakes, of course, and therefore I must die. But first, please, let's get a little order into this. Let's start with your boss. His pictures hang everywhere, and the children in the most remote village know that everything that happens is done according to his orders. The Party and the International would be entirely exonerated of all responsibility for past mistakes if his voice were to announce through the loud-speakers that he had been an enemy agent all along, and that everything - the degradation of the revolution, the murder of freedom, the destruction of the Party in the interests of the counter-revolution, the massacre of the old, tried revolutionaries - everything was his doing, and that . . .'

'Are you out of your mind? You're proving now that you're not just an opponent, you're an infamous enemy!'

'What's frightened you so? If you don't get me to agree, are they planning to ship you back to the north-east?'

The man had gone quite pale, and now he jumped up and shouted: 'You're the wickedest man I ever met!' He took a long breath, and then added in a low voice, almost a whisper:

'You've done your best to ruin everyone you've had anything to do with since being here. Why?'

'First answer my question. Will something unpleasant happen to you if you don't succeed in making me give in?'

'That's nothing to do with it. Besides, it's unimportant.'

'Sit down again. The others were nothing but vile police spies: You're a policeman, too, but you might have been a comrade. In a free election, if you people had such a thing, you might have won a few thousand votes, which isn't bad. Which is why I'll answer you. I'm over fifty years old. If I live another seven weeks I'll be fifty-one. I joined the movement at the age of eighteen. When I was twenty-two several thousand metal workers decided I might be their man, and they elected me. From that time on I was always elected – in free elections, you understand? – finally by hundreds of thousands of the finest workers in Germany. And the men who elected me thought this: "Soennecke will look after our interests. He'll stand up for us. He'll always fight against the employers, against the power of the State, against the cops and the interrogating judges, the state prosecutors and the magistrates." Nobody ever compelled them to take up jobs like that, and so I can't say it worried me whether or not they were otherwise decent chaps. They've been my enemies all along, because I've had to look after the interests of the working men. And I've been doing that now for thirty years. Do you understand now?'

'No. I most certainly don't. None of that applies here. This isn't a bourgeois country.'

'In France they have *Liberty, Equality, Fraternity* in big letters over the doors of the prisons. Thiers massacred the men of the Commune to the tune of the *Marseillaise*, a revolutionary song if ever there was one. Since the victory of Christianity there has only ever been one year when there wasn't a war going on; for the rest of the time people have been killing each other for love of their neighbours, and doing it with cannons blessed by the Church. You've realised socialism here, you say, and since then the workers have no real trades unions any more, no liberty of association, no liberty of movement, but the police force, though they're as frightened of it as ever they were of the Czarist one, they're supposed to love because you say it's the sword of the revolution. You won't manage to win me over. You're not our police, because we don't have any police. For me you're the same enemy I've been

fighting ever since I joined the movement and I recognise you as such. I'm not your accomplice. You can't even accuse me, or try me, and so you'll murder me, the way those others murdered Rosa Luxemburg.'

'That's enough, and more than enough. You'll stop talking this reformist nonsense. You'll give in, don't you worry. By the time we've finished with you, you'll confess to having murdered your own mother, if we should want you to.'

'We? Who's we? Not you. You'll be rotting away up in the north-east.'

The men were changed, and so were the methods, and Soennecke began to break down physically. Even if he'd still been given the chance of arguing and of cornering the witnesses, he wouldn't have had the strength to do so. He relapsed into silence, and no torture could make him speak. So they played their last card. He was left alone for three days in the rat-hole. Then they pulled him up out of it. In the passageway they knocked him down two or three times. His clothes were in rags and so filthy that they stank. His face and hands were bloody. That was the state he was in when he was led into a room where he was left alone. Soon afterwards a door opened. He kept his eyes closed for the light hurt them. He didn't care who'd come in.

It was the boy who spoke first, tonelessly:

'That's not you, Father, is it?'

'Why not? You recognised me right away.'

'Why don't you sit down, Father?'

'Is there a chair here?'

'No,' the boy answered miserably. 'I'll go and fetch one.'

'You can't do that, Karl. It's sure not to be allowed.'

That was Klara's voice. He opened his eyes and gazed at his daughter for a moment. She looked down at the floor.

'Why have you come here, Klara? You should have sworn to them that you didn't want anything more to do with me.'

'I did that - all the time,' she interrupted.

'And what did they promise you then? That the movie about the socialist cotton-wool would be made more quickly if you could persuade me to act a part in one of their trials?'

She said nothing; she knew that that was not the right approach.

'Father! Father!'

That was the boy who was crying silently.

'Are you crying because you want something from me. Or because of the way I look?'

The boy lost control of himself and sobbed noisily.

'All right. You needn't answer. It was a dangerous question and I won't ask any more. You've already been kicked out of your school, I suppose, and sent to work in a factory. Well, that won't do you any harm. It's where you belong.'

'They won't leave him there if you go on like this, Father,' Klara said. 'Something awful will happen to us both. They'll send us to Siberia, or maybe something worse. Don't you understand?'

'Of course I do. They're very thorough on occasions like this.'

'No. If you'll only do what they want, nothing will happen to us. You can save us! You must save us!'

'Very prettily said, Klara, and with plenty of feeling. Just like on the stage. But tell me why I must save you in particular.'

'Because we're your children.'

'The young men I sent into battle were also somebody's children. I couldn't afford to have pity for them or for their parents either. I have no right to treat you any better than I did them, and they were worth a lot more than you are.'

'You're mad, father! You're absolutely mad!' Klara shouted. She was standing in front of him, her right hand clenched inside her grey woollen glove. 'Give in! You must give in!'

'Karl, please throw this person out. It's the last service you'll ever be able to do your father.'

At that moment the door opened and Pal came in, quickly, as though he'd been pushed from behind. He was neatly dressed and looked self-possessed and well-fed. He began to speak even before he'd looked around the room.

'Give in Herbert. Save these two and to hell with the rest of it. You think you must hold out to the end because you're Soennecke, the workers' leader. But it's not true. You're not that any more. Look at me. There are a couple of weeks left before the trial, and I'll spend them pleasantly, playing chess, reading good books and quietly learning my part in the trial by heart. Look at this suit. Actually it's meant for the trial, but they let me wear it to come and see you. Come on, Herbert. Turn round. Look at me. Shake hands with me. Be a human being.'

Sonnecke had been standing facing the wall. Now he turned and was about to take a step towards Pal, whom he now caught sight of for the first time, but instead he stood still. When Pal saw him he took half a step backwards, towards the door. The words still came gaily from his mouth, but suddenly, in the middle of a sentence, he stopped. He went over to Sonnecke and took his head gently between his hands, stammering:

'Herbert! Herbert!'

It was as though he were begging for help. Soennecke said slowly:

'One of the survivors will have an important job to do, finding out exactly when this development began and what part each of us played in it. He'll have to assess the guilt of each individual one of us exactly.'

'Yes,' Pal said, letting his hands drop. 'I understand. Only I shan't be one of the survivors. It's all been so falsified already that nobody will now ever be able to sort out the truth.'

'You're wrong there. You think that because you're a coward. And that's why you gave in. This is all just an incident, a phase unimportant but instructive. In fifteen or thirty years it'll be over, and then will be the time to start again. It must happen that way! Then they'll have need of me, dead but with my hands clean, without a stain on my honour. I'm thinking of the people who'll be young in thirty years' time. You can see that, Pal. Now take these children out with you. I can't bear any more of this.'

'Yes, I understand you, Herbert. I'm going, but first I must ask you to forgive me. I ...'

'Forget it, Pal. Take them away with you, and quickly.'

That night Soennecke was liquidated, shot from behind in the back of the neck.

* * *

Vasso didn't even go with Mara as far as the door of their room. He heard her steps as she walked down the corridor, then the hall door opened, and she was gone.

He couldn't watch her from the window, since it opened on to the interior court. He lay down on the bed and pulled his overcoat up over himself. Surely things wouldn't reach the point where he'd have to sell that too? He kept glancing at his watch, for that way he could follow Mara on her route - at least for about two hours, until she reached the little village. After that her main journey began, a long roundabout trip to the Black Sea and abroad.

This was his final victory, and really the only one in his whole life that had been worth winning; now that it was certain that he was lost, he had persuaded Mara to leave him. For weeks past no one had dared return his greetings. For some time he'd been given no more little translations to do. He received no letters and he was not allowed to shop at the co-operative store. It's true he was still allowed to travel by tram, but since the reading-rooms and libraries were closed to him he hardly ever went out.

They hesitated, at first, about selling the typewriter, but once it was

clear that this was the last act and that there wouldn't be any other, they sold it. Vasso gave most of the money to Mara, keeping only enough for himself to last him about two weeks. If by that time he still hadn't been arrested he'd have to sell his overcoat and the cushions. There was nothing else that belonged to him.

The two weeks passed. Vasso sold his coat, the cushions and two of his three shirts. He got a very poor price for them and had to limit himself to one meal a day. He wrote a great deal going on late into the night. Before he went to bed he would burn everything he had written that day. So time passed. It was a dark room, and no ray of sunshine ever penetrated it. Vasso had lost all interest in the weather; it wasn't his weather any more. He scarcely read the papers at all.

At last they came. They asked about his wife, casually, so perhaps they hadn't caught her. She was probably either abroad now or dead. In either case he knew that they wouldn't be able to use her to blackmail him.

He was put in a cell by himself, given five sheets of lined paper and writing materials, and told to write his autobiography; he was particularly instructed to include his political career. He wrote on the topmost sheet: ‘I've been living for the past weeks on bread and water. I'm weak and undernourished. For weeks I haven't spoken to a single human being, and at any moment I'm likely to develop prison neurosis. I am neither morally nor physically in a condition to write my autobiography.’ They didn't bother him. Three days later the standard of his food was appreciably improved and he was given an extra blanket.

His days were fully occupied. Every day – mentally – he wrote letters, one a day, which he then learned by heart and translated into several foreign languages. The morning he would spend in composing the letter, the afternoon and part of the evening he devoted to the translations. The letters were numbered in sequence. He had begun writing them shortly after Mara's departure. He had already reached No. 40. With a single exception they were all addressed to Doino.

Each morning, as soon as he had breakfasted and tidied up his cell, he wrapped himself in his blankets and sat down on the stool facing the little window, and ‘wrote’. When he had finally composed a sentence to his complete satisfaction he would murmur it aloud, two or three times.

‘Remember, Doino, that each one of these letters I am writing to you is the last, even though others may follow. I am writing each one on the assumption that there will be no more.

‘When I am dead, your life, too, will have ceased, Doino. You will

be starting your after-life, in which I, too, shall take part, and which you will live with continual reference to myself. The important thing is that you should not drag me with you like a dead weight. Choose your road well, so that I may accompany you along it. I am dying at the age of forty-four, yet it is not too soon, for I have given a rounded meaning to my life. They are killing me in order to distort that meaning into the contradiction of itself. Therefore, my life will only be truly fulfilled if you can give proper sense to my death. You must study my death the way you should study a long fulfilment. Don't waste your talents and the time still granted you, which may not be long, in constructing an *a priori* system designed to prove that my killers are the enemies of all I lived for and of everything for which they still claim to be fighting.

'Whatever causes our predecessors believed themselves to be fighting for, in fact it was always against something that they fought and died. If the cause to which I devoted my life is truly damned for all eternity to disappear in the filthiness of the Djugashvilis, then I, too, am dying against something and, therefore, senselessly and to no avail. If that's the case I shall have squandered everything to no purpose. If our victory without victims, the first truly human victory in all history, cannot take place, if the Djugashvilis are inevitable, then, in that case, they are justified in destroying me, they are right and I have been wrong all my life. Then all I have done, and even my end, is nothing but arrogance and foolish denial.

'Don't think for a moment that they can ever conquer me. For I have condemned them in the name of the cause, and therefore they have not the power to judge me. But on the day that you desert the cause, then I shall be damned. Remember that, Doino, and think well.

'There are some things of which I shall not speak to you. They are already part of dying and belong to that image of me which will exist when I am one with the past. It is because of them that I do not write to Mara, since I could not withhold them from her. If they should assume such strength as to force their way into my letters, pay no attention. . . .

Yet it was precisely to avoid them that Vasso, even while still living in his old room, had begun to write those letters.

It was the third night after his separation from Mara. He awoke petrified with terror, and the victim of a strange delusion. He ran his hand along his body, starting from his shoulder. Yes, it was his body all right, and not that of a little, bent man, with thin red hair and legs too short for him, who had kept trying to cross a busy street and kept

jumping back in terror, until, suddenly hurling himself forward, he collided with a horribly hard wall. No, it was himself, a man taller than the average, it was Vasso. The other man was only the product of a dream, a dream too intensely dreamt. He got up and switched the light on. He smoked a cigarette butt right down to the end. But he couldn't rid himself of the idea that there was somebody else in the room - to be precise, the little, red-haired man. It was nonsense of course. The room was small enough, but the light was poor. He looked thoroughly in every corner. Needless to say there was nobody there. He turned the light off and stood still for a moment, listening. Nothing. And then Vasso began to talk to the man. He knew, of course, that he was really talking to himself because he was alone, because there was nobody left he could even say good morning to, because he had to hear the sound of a voice even if it was only his own.

The little man with red hair was himself. And thus his dream assumed a meaning that was quite simple: he had been attempting to cross to the other side, he had hesitated until it was too late, and so he had banged his head against a wall. All quite clear.

The next day, since his bread was stale and hard, he had soaked it in warm sugar-water. While waiting for it to become soft he walked up and down the room. He suddenly realised that each time he reached the end of the room he was banging his head against the wall. It didn't really hurt, but there was no sense in it. He took the bowl with the sugar-water and the piece of bread and sat down. Then he found he needed a fork so he got up to get one. But instead of going over to the table he walked to the far corner of the room and banged his head against the wall. It was then that he saw the danger, and it was in order to avoid it that he began to write. In his first letter he explained why it was to Doino and to no one else that he was writing.

'...for the moment will come, and I can picture it down to the smallest detail. It will be late at night. You'll be preparing your final cup of Turkish coffee and you'll be already enjoying its rich aroma. One or two more puffs, and it'll be time to stub your cigarette out in the overfilled ashtray. And suddenly, in the midst of these banal activities and at this insignificant moment, it will happen. You'll be overwhelmed by the certainty: "Vasso has ceased to exist. He's perished in inhuman solitude." You'll fix your eyes on a spot on the wall, as though I might step through the ugly wallpaper and walk towards you. For the length of time it takes to draw a breath you'll wait for me. And since I shan't come, you'll turn inwards, to look for me in yourself. And then you'll learn something that you've already long known, that

every man can pass by a million corpses without slowing his pace, but that for every man there is one corpse over which he must eventually stumble. Even if it's a thousand miles away, yet he must fall over it, and when he gets up again it gets up with him. I am that corpse for you, Doino, as you would have been for me had our rôles been reversed. That is why I am writing to you. And I know that on that night you will know everything of what I write. For then not even your faults will help you. Neither your arrogance, which allows you to be pliant and even cowardly in matters that you regard as inessential; nor your vanity, which compels you to hide your wounds instead of complaining about them and thus healing them. You won't then be able to be merely fair when you ought to be generous, or to offer only a handsome pardon when you should love and suffer. And that, Doino, is why you'll understand the words I am writing as though you had thought them yourself. Don't misunderstand me, Doino, I'm not asking you to forget your "historic perspective". On the contrary. But I do know that though "historic perspective" may be satisfactory as far as mass graves are concerned, for this particular individual death you will find it wretchedly insufficient. Forgive me for feeling no pity for you.'

Only while writing was Vasso himself, undivided in mind and, therefore, not threatened by chaos. That was why he devoted all his waking hours to the composition of these letters. The little red-haired man had not vanished entirely, but he had become quite insignificant and vague, and had ceased being an anxiety. For one whole morning he completely disappeared. The night before Vasso had had a grim nightmare: it was evening. Vaguely in the background workers were walking about and going home to their houses where lights were already burning. In the foreground was a single-track railroad; Mara approached and climbed slowly and easily up the embankment, where she stopped. A train was coming, not fast, but at a regular speed. Mara turned towards him, and then Vasso could see himself entering his dream. She examined him carefully, as though to make sure he was wearing a clean shirt and his suit was brushed. Then she turned away, stepped on to the track and walked towards the train. Vasso shouted: "Mara!" but it was too late. The train ran over her and went on. The extraordinary and horrible part of the dream was the way all the movements were so deliberate, so devoid of emphasis.

A few days later Vasso was moved into a communal cell. There he found the four men who had used for names the seasons of the year. Once upon a time their victory had been his defeat. There also was Djura, the writer.

Djura's face had grown thin and was almost entirely hidden behind a red beard - a ridiculous mask that was generally motionless, for Djura didn't speak for days on end. Sometimes at night he would begin to talk, and it was then impossible to know whether he had been lying with his eyes open all the time or whether he had just woken up. On such occasions nothing could silence him. There was nothing for the others to do except wait until he fell silent from exhaustion.

He was the only one who greeted Vasso. The season men said nothing, and looked away as soon as they saw who he was.

'So you're still alive, Vasso!' With his sleeve he rubbed the tears from his eyes, and a straw remained caught in his beard. 'You're alive, and I'd already prepared it all. First, a short prologue: you appear and there's the normal characterisation, routine stuff, rather flatly written without any comment, everything seen from the outside, as in a film. Then about a hundred and twenty pages without a break. The news of your death reaches the land, first to the big city and gradually spreading out, until at last it comes to your village, to your parents. All done quite briefly and simply you know, like in a woodcut. You can, of course, guess what happens next. For many of the people you have already been dead a long time, and for all of them it is many years since you disappeared into the land of uncertainty. Now that they know you are dead, you come home for them, and they begin to take you into account once again. For many what has been confused and chaotic becomes clarified in view of your existence. "It is time to make a fresh start," many of the people think. "Why should we wait any longer, and for whom?" So your death brings change and excitement, more than did the last years of your life when you were already consigned to the morgue. I called you Streten Loga. God knows why! And now, all of a sudden, here you are in this stinking cell. You're alive, and all my work is wasted.'

Before Vasso could say anything, Djura had already gone back to his corner. Vasso asked:

'Where can I lie down?'

Nobody answered. He stretched himself out beside Djura and closed his eyes. He was shaken by this meeting with old friends who had turned against him, and also by Djura's words. It seemed to him that something had begun to stir within himself, something that was driven by a curious heat and that was trying to escape. He listened to Djura's heavy, rheumy breathing, and to the footsteps of the two men who were pacing up and down the cell. The little red-haired man had entirely vanished. His life had entered a new phase, its final one. He

hadn't anticipated this. He would write no more letters, he would exist. He leaned his head right back and opened his mouth wide. Not to sob aloud, that above all! Just a few minutes' self-control.

Djura was quiet that night. Two of the others whispered together, but their words were mostly inaudible.

The next day Vasso said:

'I want to know why you refuse to speak to me. The fact that I raised each of you up, each one of you, and started you on your careers, you must have forgiven me for that long ago. At least you must know that I can't harm any one of you now. So what is it? Not hatred, not resentment that you owe me gratitude, since you must have forgiven me your ingratitude long ago too. Do you not speak because you are frightened for your lives?'

Towards evening he stood in the middle of the cell and said:

'If you don't change your behaviour I'm liable to confess to a series of very serious crimes and implicate you in them. I wish to see friendly faces around me. I want to be talked to. I expect to get a straight answer to any questions I may ask. And starting from tomorrow morning. Meanwhile tonight, before I go to sleep. I shall wish you all good night. Each one of you will reply clearly and loudly: "Good night, Vasso, sleep well!"'

Vasso kept putting it off. His heart was thumping and he was afraid lest they shouldn't reply. Finally he said:

'Good night!'

They answered. "

Even before daybreak Djura woke him.

'It's a bit of luck their putting you in here. I see now that my whole story was drivel, journalism. Two or three hundred lines inflated to fill a book. I'm ashamed of myself. It's enough just to look at you the way you now are to see that the idea of constructing a resurrection story around you is an obvious trick, a stale old idea. Any hack journalist could do it. But now I've got it. Listen!'

"One moment before you start. Won't you tell me first why you're here? What do they want with you?"

'How should I know?' Djura replied impatiently. 'It's all a misunderstanding. It'll be cleared up. They invited me to this country because I wanted to collect material for a novel about the new socialist man, and meanwhile I was to deliver some lectures. I travelled all over the place, from Niegoleroye to Vladivostock. Then they asked me to see a sanatorium, a beautiful place. I was collecting my material, of course, and so I talked to everybody, and I found that there wasn't one

single working-man in the place. There were other sanatoria in the neighbourhood, so I made enquiries in them, asking the same questions wherever I went and getting the same answers. Not one proper working-man. This made people nervous. Then I got a telegram saying I should come to Moscow at once as the date of my lecture in the Red Army Club had been advanced. Very well, off I go. I arrive. I'm stopped. I show my papers and then they say I'm not myself but a criminal pretending to be me. As I say a misunderstanding. They've only got to find out that it was the spy in the Eupatoria sanatoria, looking for the simple workers, who was the counter-revolutionary criminal, and then they'll realise that they made a mistake and jailed the real Djura, and, of course, they'll set me free. So don't worry about me, Vasso. Now listen and please don't interrupt.

'Locale - my village, on account of the swamp that's there as you'll see presently. Let's call it Staro-Selo. Hero - yourself, called by your proper name. You're twenty years old, and you've come back to the village for a holiday. I'll describe you just like you were at that age. I'll show how the people were attracted by you, the suspicious old peasants, the young girls, the children. They all wanted to see their own reflection in your eyes. Let's skip all that. It's difficult to tell it. It won't be easy to write properly either. I'll have to paint you in quite simple colours, without any golden halo, and yet make it completely obvious to the reader why a whole village had found its justification and its honour, and - yes - its goodness, because it had found someone it could love. I'll work at those passages until I've made it entirely plain, and my character becomes a man of flesh and blood.'

'It's the second night of the Easter festival. The weather has been unnaturally warm, almost like midsummer, and there was rain in the late afternoon. Now it's dark and over the village arches the star-studded sky. You have been to call on the young teacher in her house in the neighbouring village and are walking back late to Staro-Selo. You've already reached the village street when you hear somebody shouting. You realise at once what's happened. It's Baca, the most depraved of the villagers, the thief and syphilitic drunkard. He must have strayed off the path and fallen into the swamp. You run to him and pull him out, which is frightfully hard work. You're still panting for breath when he pushes you into the swamp, either by mistake or because he's drunk or from pure malice, God knows why. You say to him: "Baca, give me a hand and pull me out." He's already walking away and he turned and says: "I shouted and shouted. I must have woken the whole village, and nobody came to save me. Now it's your

turn to shout, Vasso Militch. They'll all come to help you." You think at first it's just a drunken joke and that he'll come back in a moment and pull you out, but he goes on walking away from the village. You call to him again, and this time he doesn't even turn round. The swamp is beginning to suck you down, as though it were an enormous monster with a very small throat swallowing you, slowly, gradually, but without pause! Whatever you do you sink deeper in, and the mud is already up to your navel. And then you begin to call, not loudly at first, as though there were no particular urgency, for you can't imagine anyone actually dying this way. Then, when it's too late, you begin to call louder, to shout, to scream. But your chest isn't free any more and your cries, instead of becoming louder, grow weaker all the time. You stretch up your arms. You sink slowly deeper. And you die. In the morning they find your spectacles.'

'That must be the end of your story, Djura. Have a heart and let us get some sleep.' It was Winter. The other three had been listening too.

'No, that's not the end. Come, Vasso, take the blanket. Stand up and we'll walk up and down for a bit. I can't stand it when you shiver with cold like that. Now listen. Early in the morning the village realises what has happened. The villagers feel and, indeed, without a word being spoken they're certain, that they are all responsible for your death. For, of course, they had heard Baca shouting, and not one of them had thought of rescuing him. Each one had said to himself: "Should I bother about that drunkard? Someone's sure to go and fish him out." And the next morning each one of them sees the connection, which is this: Whosoever accepts the destruction of any human being, be that man a Baca, is by his acceptance preparing the death of his own son or of his own brother. Is everything clear so far, Vasso? Quite straightforward?'

'Yes, I think so,' Vasso replied. He was freezing with cold and he would have liked to lie down again and huddle up and go back to sleep. 'I think so. Only I don't see why you want to call your young man by my name. What's he got to do with me?'

'I see it,' Winter said thoughtfully. He stood up and came over to the other two. 'Djura has turned his resurrection story inside out.'

'Inside out? Inside out?' Djura repeated. 'No, that's not the right word. In any case listen carefully now, because this is where my story really begins. You understand from what I've already said that this Vasso has come to occupy a very special place in the lives of all who knew him. Whenever one of them thinks of the future, Vasso certainly has a part in it. In political terms he had already become for them the

man who was to found a party for the poor and the oppressed. Now Vasso is dead at twenty with his work not done. For the survivors it is more than just a gap that he has left behind him, for his non-existence becomes a particular aspect of his existence, the way that for certain peoples who believe in magic dead ancestors are more real than their live descendants. You see it's as though . . .'

He stopped talking and went over to his corner. After a while he said:

'Forgive me for having woken you up, Vasso. It's all worthless drivel. It seemed so clear, and now it's confused and valueless.'

'No,' said Winter. 'You're wrong there, Djura. When you're free again you'll put it all down on paper, quietly and calmly. It'll be good.'

'Perhaps Vladko's right,' Vasso said. It was many years since he had last called Winter by his true name, and not by the German word for a season. Winter said:

'If Vasso Militch had died at twenty I should have been a beekeeper. It mightn't have been a bad life, but it would have been somebody else's, not mine. Do you remember, Vasso, the time you came and made a speech in our village, and afterwards, when we asked you questions, I spoke against the people in the cities and said they were drones?'

'Yes, I remember, Vladko. And then I took you to a congress in the city.'

They lay down again, both silent, sunk in memories that brought the past so near to them. It was inconceivable how their friendship could ever have ended, degenerating into mistrust and even enmity.

Winter said:

'It was a succession of blows from outside, each one of which drove us further and further apart. It's amazing how easy it is, in the space of a few years, to make a man disappear behind the opinions he holds or is supposed to hold. You weren't Vasso any more. You weren't my friend. You became an opinion, a dangerous deviation. It's so simple to despise and hate an opinion. So we fought you and you fought us. We accepted the tyrannical decree of forgetfulness. That way each man loses his real past, and the present alone decides what his past is to have been. And now we're supposed to stand by and watch while you're sucked down into the swamp. And afterwards we're supposed to say that you were really Baca all the time.'

'And will you do it?'

'I shan't pull you out of the swamp. I'll drown there too. But I'll never say that you were Baca.'

Their cell changed. They almost forgot where they were, since they hardly ever spoke of the curious developments that were deciding their fate. They were the leaders of the revolution. There was nobody in the whole wide world who would intervene on their behalf. All that was powerful on the planet was against them. One evening when they were sitting in the dark, hungry and cold, Djura, who had recovered his gaiety, began to talk. He described to them, with extraordinary clarity and a wealth of amusing detail, the absolutely limitless nature of their impotence. And all of a sudden they all experienced the same sensation, a realisation that there was literally nothing that they could do, and that all attempts they might make to improve their lot were bound to be vain and ridiculous. And with one accord they began to laugh, all together, for suddenly all anxiety and all need to make an effort had been taken from them once and for all. They laughed until the tears streamed down their beards. Djura stood in the middle of the cell, a filthy kerchief wound round his bald pate, grotesque in his rags, holding on to his stomach for laughter. He kept trying to finish a sentence:

'So you see we're the only dead men who can laugh, we're the only . . . ho . . . ho . . . ho . . . !'

He couldn't go on, he was almost doubled up with laughter.

There was only one of them who didn't take part in their conversation. This was Zvonimir, whose season-name was Lenz, and who resisted the general gaiety. But when at last they had regained control of themselves, he began to sing. He had a fine, rich baritone voice. While working for the International he had spent about a year in Italy, and in order to have some apparent reason for being there he'd taken singing lessons. This was his first chance to show anyone what'd he'd learned, and he wanted to sing arias. But none of them wanted to hear the arias he had studied with his Italian maestro. They asked him to sing the songs of their own country.

'Yes,' Zvonimir said. 'At the time of the big strike, when Andrei and I got back to our shack in the woods, we were always dead tired, but we couldn't sleep, and then he'd make me sing. I've never known such a listener as him. Now he's been dead for a long time - almost six years. It's a good thing not to have any doubts about the man who wants to kill you, to know for sure that he's your enemy. Andrei was lucky. Well, what shall I sing?'

The days that followed were good days.

Then Djura was sent for. When he came back he had shaved and had a bath. The 'misunderstanding' was cleared up and he was free.

'So I'll be giving my lecture in the Red Army Club after all. It's been delayed a bit, but that makes no difference. I'll propose to them that Marx, Engels, Lenin, and - why not? - Heraclitus, Spinoza and the rest of the boys were really none other than Joseph Vissarionovitch Djugashvili, using a series of pseudonyms. Behind all those masks, assumed for some reason of inexplicable modesty, there hides none other than the one and only, the absolutely unique Stalin. Thus misunderstanding will vanish from the world, once and for all.'

They stood around him, trying to make jokes, but they soon fell silent. It was not the idea of freedom, not the fact that he was going on living, that silenced them, but the thought that one of them would see their own country once again. They were homesick, like a child that has run away in the night.

The next day, Lenz was taken away, and he didn't come back. Then - it was late and they'd lain down to sleep - men came and fetched Vasso. He was to take all his belongings with him, including his blanket, and he was to hurry, hurry. He looked once more at each one of his companions and called him by his real name.

He was taken to another wing of the great building. This was no longer part of the prison. There were wide carpeted staircases. He was led into an elegant bathroom and told to take off all his clothes and have a thorough bath. But he was to hurry. They didn't leave him alone. A barber came and gave him a haircut, shave and shampoo. His nails were cut and he was massaged with a rather overpowerful eau de cologne. He was given good, warm underclothes, a well-cut shirt, a rather loud tie, a dark suit that was a little too big for him, strong shoes that had, however, already been worn. In the pockets were two handkerchiefs and a packet of cigarettes.

The drive in the closed car lasted only a few minutes. He couldn't be sure where he was and he didn't like to ask, but he thought they were in the centre of the town. The men in uniform who accompanied him were changed several times before he was finally ushered into a large study. There he was left alone and told to wait. After about twenty minutes - there was a fabergé clock behind the enormous desk - the man was suddenly there. Vasso had not heard him come in.

'I know you, Comrade Militch. I attended a course of yours, a long, long time ago. You certainly wouldn't remember me. I was just one pupil among so many, and neither the cleverest nor the most interesting.'

Vasso recognised him.

'I do remember you. Your eyes haven't changed, bright, cheerful eyes, and you still bite your lower lip the way you used to. You were

among the cleverer students, but not the cleverest nor the most interesting. You've been lucky. The cleverest is dead, and so's the most interesting, and you're alive.'

'That's good!' The man laughed good-naturedly. 'That's very good! I'm alive and enjoying myself because I was neither the cleverest nor the most interesting of your pupils. Very good indeed! But I was one of the cleverer ones?'

'Yes. You once answered a question - concerning an analysis of the tactical mistakes made by the German party in '23 and '24 - and answered it very well, Comrade Mirin.'

'And you haven't forgotten that?'

Vasso looked at him as he stood there, leaning forward a little on his toes. He was of medium height, well built, with ash-blond hair parted on one side and brushed back from his wide, smooth forehead. The expression in his eyes was clear and cheerful. His face had filled out, perhaps a little bit too much, and his smooth skin was sleek and sunburned. Perhaps he had just come from one of those sanatoria where Djura had tried in vain to find a simple working-man. Or perhaps he was fond of sport. Mirin was well dressed. Diplomats made it their business to bring him back choice articles from abroad. Didn't everyone know that Mirin was the personal private secretary of the 'greatest leader of all times'?

'Now to business, Comrade Militch. Your Party has fallen into absolute disrepute, those Winters and Lenzes and so on - it's strange that they should have chosen German names of all things - those fellows, I say, have proved a complete failure. Through incapability, of course, but possibly for other, more suspicious reasons. The fact of their having eliminated you so completely is in itself suspect, though incidentally it's a bit of luck for you, since it means that you can now take over the leadership of the Party. We could make up our minds to trust you. I say we could, because there are conditions attached. After you've agreed to them you'll go to a sanatorium in the Crimea or the Caucasus, you'll get your wife to join you there, and then when you've had three or four months complete rest you'll go abroad. You'll reorganise the Party from Prague or Vienna, and you'll take the whole business firmly in hand. I say, firmly. There, on the desk, in the green folder, you'll find the conditions clearly formulated. In the red one you'll find paper on which to write your statement and the letter. There's no particular need for you to hurry. You have two hours. Once everything's in order you won't have to go back to where you've just come from. I say "go back", and you know what I mean. Well, I'll see you in two hours' time.'

Vasso sat down at the desk and pulled the green folder towards him. There were three typed pages with corrections and emendations in a hand he did not know. The paragraphs were numbered. There were nine of them, nine requirements that he would have to fulfil if he wished to go on living.

He was curious to know what they were, but he had two hours to find out. He leaned back in the chair, stretched out his legs, and put his spectacles on the desk. The room was overheated; this was the first time in months that he wasn't freezing with cold. A woman, accompanied by a man in uniform, wheeled in a trolley on which were sandwiches, cake, tea and vodka. Vasso decided not to touch anything until he had read the conditions in the folder. He got up and walked over to the window, where he pushed back the heavy curtains. In the far distance he could see a bridge. The lamps along its parapet were weak, and he couldn't see their reflection in the water. He was sorry about this, as though seeing the river were a matter of great importance to him.

He took the folder from the desk and read quickly through the nine paragraphs. The first ordered him to write a statement of repentance. The various points that he was to include in it were outlined briefly. Their number was considerable. He read this paragraph again carefully and counted them: there were nineteen separate items. In part they consisted of incidents with which he had had nothing to do: in part with mistakes against which he had protested at the time; in part with measures ordered by the 'infallible leader' himself. Where Vasso had succeeded, he was to condemn his successes as failures; where others had failed, he was to accept the responsibility and take the blame for himself. They were only right about one point. He had always avoided being as noisy in his protests against the opposition as Byzantine custom required. In consequence, from now on he was to protest all the more loudly and unrestrainedly and with all the greater conviction.

The second paragraph ordered him to write an open letter to the 'leader of the world proletariat', 'the brilliant pilot of the revolution'. In a minimum of two hundred and fifty lines he was to bear witness to his infallibility and was also to damn unequivocally all the opponents of the 'great pilot'. Finally he was to assert that the opponents had not acted as they did out of error, but rather because they had been criminals from the start - which their whole lives proved, by what they had done as well as by what they had not done.

It was a pity, Vasso thought, that Djura wasn't there. He drank a glass of vodka, ate the sandwiches slowly, and poured himself out some tea. He missed Djura. They could have shared the drinks and the tea,

the good food and the cigarettes. And then Djura could have transformed the whole situation into a village story – with or without a swamp, but certainly with characters who died most remarkable deaths. For such transpositions à la Djura, the fourth paragraph, the funniest, was particularly well suited. It ordered Vasso to write a statement aimed at the destruction of the four men with the names of seasons and of Karel. This would have amounted to a veritable condemnation to death, since he was to unmask them as being insane agents of Mussolini, police spies in the pay of the bloodthirsty Alexander Karageorgevitch and of the Prince Regent, common thieves, swindlers who had sold themselves body and soul to the service of Pan-Serbian imperialism; and so on. The most amusing item in this accusation was to be a statement to the effect that Karel, Winter and Lenz had never really been Party members, but under the dishonest pretence of belonging to it had wormed their way into their present positions. It really was a great pity Djura wasn't there. Once, parodying a German literary historian, he had written: 'Heinrich Heine was utterly devoid of talent, but being a Jew was such an expert fraud that he wrote over a hundred great poems, solely with the object of swindling the open-hearted, simple Germans into believing that he could write poetry.'

The other paragraphs were dull reading, with the exception of two. One proposed that Vasso deliver a written text, of not less than sixty printed pages, within the next eight weeks, proving that thanks to the genial leadership of the greatest practical and theoretical revolutionary of all time, socialism was already fully established in the Soviet Union and the transition to the next stage, the creation of a truly communist society, had already begun. He was further to proclaim that the Moscow trials, at which the old leaders of the International had been found guilty, provided the surest basic for preserving world peace. Finally, there was the last paragraph. Vasso was to assure Mara's prompt return and to see to it that she, too, wrote a declaration; in this she was to state, among other things, that she had freed herself entirely from the influences of her 'social origin', and that she would fight 'until the last remnant of that social order in which her great-grandfather, her grandfather and her father had lived out their blood-sucking sadistic lives was finally destroyed'.

Vasso drew back the curtains, pulled an armchair up to the window, and made himself comfortable. The two hours would soon be over, and he wanted to enjoy what was left of them. He took off his shoes and put his feet up on the central heating pipes. It was marvellous. Now if only he could go to sleep!

The man in uniform came in and asked him to hand over what he had written.

Without taking his eyes from the window, Vasso said:

'There's nothing written. Nothing.'

The man repeated, 'Nothing!' and left the room.

Half an hour later he was back.

'Nothing? Nothing written?'

'No, nothing written.'

After twenty minutes he was there again. This time he was carrying a brown dossier.

'You are please to read this at once!'

He wouldn't let go of the dossier until Vasso had got up and sat down at the desk. Even then he held on to it, handing him only one sheet at a time. They were protocols, properly drawn up and signed. One bore Winter's signature - a neat, tidy hand, though he seemed to have hesitated at the end, for there was a hiatus in each of the last two syllables of his name. Another was signed by Karel - a complicated, hardly legible signature like that of a brave boy who's been suddenly frightened. The writing of Zvonimir, which slanted to the left, was unchanged, the writing of a man who lives pleasantly, who seldom worries, and who never loses his appetite.

The passages that Vasso were to read were underlined. Winter, in his protocol, regretted that he had only lately grown suspicious of Vasso, and that it had taken him so long to realise Vasso's determination to sever the Party's connections with the Soviet Union and its leaders. Vasso had shown particular sympathy for the leaders of the right-wing opposition and had referred to Lenin's doctrine of an alliance with the peasantry, going so far as actually to describe the struggle against the kulaks as an error and even as a crime. In answer to a specific question, Winter admitted that he was convinced Vasso had never really been a communist and had dishonestly wormed his way into the Party for the purpose of serving the interests of the big landowners and the kulaks. Being himself the son of a kulak, he thus remained true to his class. In answer to a question as to whether Vasso was not in reality a secret agent of the Yugoslav police abroad and had recently come to Russia in that capacity, Winter at first declared that he did not believe this to be the case; later he admitted that it might be so; finally, after mature consideration, he was convinced that Vasso had been from the very beginning nothing other than a particularly dangerous secret agent in the pay of the Belgrade police, and that he had made various trips to Russia, always on forged papers, for the purpose of preparing and

finally of committing acts of sabotage, assassination and espionage against the Red Army.

Lenz's statement agreed with Winter's. He added that for many years past he had regularly warned the G.P.U. against Vasso and had passed them information concerning actions of his that were more than simply suspicious. The statements of the other two season-men did not contradict those of Winter and Lenz on any essential points.

Karel started off by saying that he regarded Vasso as the cleverest, and from all points of view the most capable, man in the country, and as the Party's only theorist. He went on to describe him as a weakling who was frightened of bloodshed, and as a man who was under the thumb of his wife who was a haughty, clever aristocrat. This woman, whose ambitions were unlimited and who was also inclined to acts of individual terrorism, had poisoned Vasso's relationships with his comrades and succeeded in increasingly isolating him from them. She spread alarmist rumours systematically, she sowed mistrust inside the Party, and she even suspected leading members of the apparatus – as, for example, Karel himself – of being in the pay of the police. Vasso had fallen more and more under her influence. In January, 1914, without the approval of the Party, he had returned to his country, had set up contacts there and had attempted to regain control of the Party, alleging that it was time internal democracy were re-established and that there should be a fresh election of leaders from the bottom up. In view of the circumstances, such behaviour was nothing other than the most dangerous sort of provocation. He spread alarm, by maintaining, among other things, that the Party leadership was responsible for the murder of Andrei Bocek and of Hrvoje Brankovic.

Vasso, and particularly his wife, had thus become a mortal danger in the land, not only on account of their great ability but also because of the prestige that they still enjoyed there. They must be rendered harmless at all costs.

The man in uniform took back the documents and handed Vasso a very small piece of paper, rolled up into a cylinder. At the door he said:

'I shall return in one hour. That is to say at a quarter to two.'

The note consisted of two words:

'Wot chto!'

'A good and grateful pupil,' Vasso thought, as he settled himself once again by the window and put his feet up on the hot pipes. 'He's making it as easy for me to save myself as he can. All that's needed is one more protocol and a few corpses. Clever but primitive, this Mirin

fellow. He has no idea what it means to think something all the way through to the end.'

Ten minutes before the time was up, Vasso sat down at the desk. He, wrote:

I am prepared to accept full responsibility for all mistakes and errors of judgment committed by the Party from the date of its foundation until the date on which, on your orders, I was almost entirely excluded from its control. I shall do this on condition that all the members of our Party at present held in your prisons shall be released at the same time as myself. The Yugoslav Party alone can judge its own members, and no one else, no police force or judicial system in the world, has the right to do so.

I shall undertake to reorganise the Party and to lead it until such time as new leaders are elected on a democratic basis. I shall do my best to ensure that such elections are held as soon as possible, that is to say within a maximum period of three months. The principal and greatest task is to recreate internal democracy within the Party and to ensure its continued existence.

I remain true to the materialistic interpretation of history and I do not accept your police interpretation of history.

That is all.

Vasso Militch.

He placed the piece of paper in the green folder and handed it to the man who came in punctually as the standing clock struck the quarter-to.

A few minutes later Mirin walked in. He was wearing a heavy fur coat that he unbuttoned in the course of their conversation. He kept his fur cap on.

'So it's suicide?' he began. 'Suicide for the sake of a bunch of worthless traitors?'

'No. I don't want to die. It's you people who want to kill me.'

'No we don't.'

'Oh, yes, you do. You are prepared to allow me a little longer to live, so that you can make me your accomplice in murder, and then you'll make it your business to see that I die – without even my self-respect left.'

'So that's it! Don't you trust us?'

'I most certainly don't!'

'Not stupid, not at all stupid. Some of our more celebrated contemporaries were far stupider.'

'They weren't stupider,' Mirin. They'd simply been your accomplices for too long. They were done for before ever you polished them off. I've never signed a declaration of repentance. I've never assisted in the murder of my comrades. I've never been your accomplice.'

'Empty words. Sheer waste of time. Besides, you're wrong. I promise you personally that if you fulfil the conditions in the folder there'll be no further action taken against you, not in six months, not ever.'

'You promise? And who promises you that in six months' time you won't be proclaiming into a microphone to the whole world that you repent for having wished to assassinate your boss, and that in order to keep your hand in you started by derailing two thousand box-cars full of merchandise?'

Mirin offered him a cigarette. Holding out his gold cigarette-lighter he said, smiling:

'~~You~~ always had a fine sense of humour, Militch, and your lectures were never dull. But, quite between ourselves, you needn't worry about my safety. My head's solidly fixed on healthy shoulders, and that's a damned good viewpoint – in every respect, if you follow me.'

Mirin was the favourite at the peak of success, to whom it is inconceivable that the sun of favour should ever set for him. He believed that nobody before had ever had such a hold over the boss – *khasiain* he called him, 'the landlord'. And at the moment he was particularly certain of this, since he had just come from the boss with whom he had spent the last few hours alone.

Vasso replied:

'I wouldn't swap with you, even though . . . even though it is frightfully cold in the cells. But that is the only fear I have left, fear of the cold. You'll admit that even though it may be a very unpleasant fear, objectively speaking it's hardly an important one.'

'If I get your meaning correctly, then, the only thing you want from me is my fur coat.'

'Yes – and your fur cap. Only as a short-term loan. You can have them back after I've been liquidated. However, you'd have to see to that yourself.'

'I offer you life and all you ask for is a fur coat. You're too modest, it'll be your undoing.'

'Mirin chattered on for a while, and from time to time Vasso would put in a word to keep the conversation going. He was obsessed with the idea that if only he were wrapped up in that magnificent fur coat he would be protected against the cold day and night until he died.'

'That's enough joking. Let's talk seriously, I say seriously. You write that you do not accept our police interpretation of history. Let's hope you don't believe in some Freudian explanation of what goes on here – I mean, you surely don't think that we've gone mad. Listen carefully! Twenty years ago a revolution took place in this country that had been

in preparation for seventy years. It was thereupon taken as proved that the revolutionary theory was correct, and that the right theory had won. But everything that's happened during the past twenty years goes to prove that the theory was wrong. What's happening in the world today shows that the age of insurrections, of mutinies, of revolutionary seizures of power is over: 'over, I say, and done with. On account of the technical development of weapons and of methods of warfare and of the changed conditions of mass organisation. The theory that the masses are automatically revolutionary may have been a useful one in time gone by, though it's never been quite true. Now, however, it's not only useless, it's false. In the circumstances of today the masses are like water — play a red light on them and they're red, a green one and they go green.'

Vasso noticed with amusement that both Mirin's manner of speech and his gestures had changed. He was patently modelling himself on somebody else, presumably his boss, and was echoing the latter's most confidential opinions in the latter's particular tone of voice. This was the new, esoteric catechism which Mirin, carelessly perhaps, was now giving away.

'We're engaged at the moment in disposing of the last stragglers, the real or potential mutineers, who justify themselves by the revolution. It's not a question of what they may once have done: all that counts is that they might now be dangerous owing to their refusal to recognise present-day reality. And the word for that reality is — power. Do you follow me quite clearly so far, Militch?'

'Yes, Mirin, quite clearly. It's all very simple.'

'What do you mean, simple?' Mirin was honestly astonished.

'You see, abroad they teach that in the schools. It's an old and stupid truth.'

'What are you talking about? You can't have understood what I was saying. Or rather, no, listen to me, this is dialectic. The words may be the same, and apparently the theory is the same, but actually the contents of the words have been radically changed. Do you follow me now?'

'Very good, I see,' Vasso said reassuringly. He didn't wish to disappoint the young man. 'Go on. It's most interesting.'

'Interesting is hardly the word for it. It's decisive, I say decisive. Now. No revolution can succeed, not in Germany, not in your country, nor anywhere else. But one day we — that is to say our parachutists, our tanks, our artillery, our N.K.V.D. troops — will turn up in Bucharest, in Warsaw, in Sofia, in Belgrade, in Ankara. The masses will wake up one morning and find that it's happened. They'll

parade and shout "Hurrah!" of course, and then – back to the factories and the mines and the fields. The masses will never capture power, which in any case would be of no use to them since they couldn't keep it. But power, our power, will capture the masses – without a revolution and without civil war. That is what's new and absolutely decisive. Do you see it now, Militch?

"It's all quite clear and you put it very well, particularly the bit about power capturing the masses. And naturally the power must remain monolithic. The more masses, that is to say the more countries, it captures, the more important it will be that it remains monolithic. If one morning when your people had suddenly turned up in Belgrade we were to start making a revolution, that would be madness; the revolution would automatically be a counter-revolution since your people would already be in power.

'Quite right, quite right!' Mirin broke in.

'And the revolutionaries who would want to make that revolution are, properly speaking, already counter-revolutionaries. They don't realise that yet, because they still have an out-of-date idea of what they are doing and what they are. And to let counter-revolutionaries and, therefore, enemies, live and grow strong when it's possible to liquidate them right away, would be sheer madness. Therefore . . .'

'Superb. You've grasped the whole thing at once.' Mirin's eyes were filled with pleasure, even with happiness. 'In the most remote Serbian peasant's hut, in every factory in the land, your picture will hang next to the chief's. In the whole country your birthday and your name day will be celebrated as a national holiday, the way they celebrate Easter now. You will be our man, the power of our power, the steel man of the new steel age, that bears one name, I say one name, Stalin!'

Should he tell this idolater that his 'new and absolutely decisive' theory was as old as the hills? That it was the customary self-deception of those who have power and would be the future ruination of their grandchildren or their great-grandchildren? Power had always captured the masses, simply because it was power. And the masses always shouted 'Hurrah' and long live this or that; they sang and huzza-ed and killed and let themselves be killed and then sank back into anonymity. If the masses should ever capture power and hold on to it – finally and for the first time – then power would lose its name and its nature, and the masses their anonymity and their inhumanity. And that was what the battle was all about. The Mirins had lost. They'd gone over to the other side, while imagining that they'd reached their objective. 'That's dialectic,' the little Mirin had said, mouthpiece of the big Mirin. The

words he said had remained the same while their content had changed. The flag is still red with the blood of the martyrs. We honour them because they died before we had the power to kill them. We still talk of revolution and socialism and freedom, but the content of those words has changed – and that's a state secret not to be repeated.

'How old were you, Mirin, in 1917, when for a while the masses seized power?'

'Eleven. It wasn't the masses who seized power. It was the Party Military Committee, under the leadership of Stalin.'

'I daresay. When you attended my course you were nineteen. At that time you didn't believe it was the Military Committee who'd seized power. So your opinions have changed since then. It is a specific idiocy of men in power to believe themselves capable of rearranging the past to suit their convenience. Poor Mirin, you've become a man of power.'

Mirin said:

'If, now, at three a.m. I were to order that by noon material were to be collected proving that you, Vasso Militch, from the day of your birth until tomorrow noon, were the greatest, most devoted and cleverest revolutionary who ever lived, intelligent, educated men would set to work; by tomorrow I would have in my possession fifty closely-written pages proving just that, beyond any shadow of doubt and containing all the requisite quotations. And if I were to desire a contrary report, I'd get that too. In that case you'd have been, from the day of your birth, an enemy of the working class, a capitalist agent, and a police spy. And of the three Party members in your native village, two would assert that you'd always been a poisonous snake, while the third would have been expelled from the Party for not saying the same thing fast enough. So, Militch, is it in fact an idiocy to wish to change the past?'

'Yes. On account of the third man.'

'He'd be disposed of.'

'In every village there's a third man. In the cities there are many more of them.'

'Half of them will be liquidated. The other half will repent and give in.'

'What total, what totalitarian stupidity! You'd have to kill thousands of men to change my past. And you'll always find there's one man you've missed, one manuscript you've forgotten to destroy. The police don't make history. All they can do is punctuate it, usually wrongly and ungrammatically, during occasional dark ages. You have your police interpretation of history. I'll stick to the materialistic one.'

'By which you mean?'

'That you'll kill me.'

'But I don't want to kill you. I want to save you, I say, save you.'

'You've read my statement. I've nothing to add to it and nothing to take away.'

Mirin talked to him excitedly. Vasso scarcely listened. He was tired and sleepy, and none of this concerned him. Mara was safe, and that was all that mattered. The fifth act was being played out. The author, not quite sure of his final effects, had hastily tacked on this extra, unnecessary scene. The ending remained the same. Mirin was no galloping king's messenger, bearing a reprieve. He was a business man who wanted to bargain, to do a deal, to pull a fast one.

Mirin was talking himself into a growing state of excitement and pacing rapidly up and down the room. Vasso started to feel cold again. He imagined that the cold must be in the marrow of his bones, for the room, though no longer overheated, was still warm enough. He sat down and closed his eyes. He only opened them occasionally to glance at the fur coat. Never before had any object seemed to him so utterly desirable.

'You're asleep!' Mirin shouted at him. 'You're asleep!'

'No, I'm only dozing.'

'Either you're crazy or else you're pretending to be.'

And suddenly he grabbed Vasso by both shoulders and cried:

'You're not crazy. You're just a man with no pity. Have pity for yourself!'

He went on shouting, as though possessed:

'Pity, Militch! Pity! Pity!'

Vasso closed his eyes and shook his head. His voice suddenly failed him, and he felt vividly the danger that threatened him. At last Mirin let go of him. He heard the door close, Vasso opened his eyes and he discovered that he was still shaking his head. He took it in both hands, as though only thus could he make it be still.

And then he heard a strange animal noise. It came from him. He was sobbing. He walked quickly over to the window and stood with his back to the room. He would stay there until they came to fetch him. Yet he soon had to sit down again, for otherwise he could not prevent his head from banging against the window-pane.

They soon came for him and took him back to the prison. His suit and his shoes were taken away. So were one of his two handkerchiefs and the cigarettes. They couldn't find the old things so they left him in the underclothes. But it was a small guardroom and the stove was

red hot. It wasn't until the morning that they gave him an old, tattered suit; the trousers were too short and the jacket far too big for him. He was put into a minute cell. He was all alone again.

He lay down and hoped that he would sleep through the day. He felt calm, almost happy, and only the sour smell of the strange suit worried him. Of his nocturnal adventure, it was only the ending that had proved a strain and a danger. It was easy to resist an enemy who offered refined bribes, but the enemy could become irresistible once he showed sympathy and friendship and love. Out of misplaced subtlety they had made a serious mistake in first putting him in with Djura, Vladko, and the rest. If he had had to spend all that time alone with his imaginary letters and the little, red-haired man, he might perhaps have been incapable of withstanding Mirin's sympathy.

As he was dropping off to sleep Vasso had to laugh over the self-estrangement and aggressive insensitivity of Mirin. He'd said: 'Surely you aren't prepared to die for the liturgy, I say the liturgy, of the revolution?' The Mirins had turned the revolution into a liturgy - 'the words are the same, but the contents have been changed' - and so they thought that revolutionaries died for a liturgy. He'd like to tell Mara about that; he'd like to describe the whole scene to her from beginning to end.

Vasso spent a further thirty-five days, the last of his life, in this tiny cell. He took to composing letters again, but after a few days he gave it up, after one letter that was not addressed to Doino. He wasted a lot of time, at first, trying to remember the name of the man for whom this letter was intended, but he failed to do so. And yet he could quite clearly visualise the fair-haired young man with the flushed forehead and the furniture of his room with the balcony.

'Never, my good comrade, will you receive this letter. The reasons for that are connected not only with yourself but also with a certain conversation that we had some six years ago. It was at night. You were about to leave for my country to find out the truth. We happened. I've forgotten how or why - to get on to the subject of pity. I told you then that we ought not to know pity, and you disagreed with me. Now the course of my life, cut brutally short, is nearing its end. A man dying as I am dying leaves far too many dialogues uncompleted. But our conversation together is properly ended by my death, for I am dying without pity. Yes, I am dying because I won't admit pity. By so doing I remain true, not only to myself, but also to the cause, because . . .

Here the letter broke off: a clear and tangible memory had

in front of Vasso. He saw a little red-haired man – no longer young, certainly at least fifty – in the frontier station at Basle. In front of him was standing a man in uniform, gazing down at him with a sarcastic and contemptuous expression on his face. The little man, who was crying, said: ‘What are you doing to me? Why do you treat me like this? Have pity, sir? What will happen to me now? Please, sir!’ And then the little man, in ghastly despair, beat his fists against his own head.

So that was it. Vasso, on that occasion, had been awakened by the man’s wailing. He was obviously a Jewish refugee. Vasso had stood at the window of his compartment and had hastily debated with himself whether or not he ought to intervene. But it was against the rules of conspiracy, which laid down that a man should at all times avoid drawing attention to himself. He was supposed to take no notice of individual misery.

The identification made Vasso happy, for now he understood why, a few hours after Mara had gone and he was left alone to await the inevitable end, this man had come to live with him in such a curious way. Now that there was no longer any mystery, this strange companion of his solitude must surely disappear.

Yet he did not disappear, not even during the two days when Karel shared his cell.

But Vasso wrote no more letters. He moved farther and farther away from everything that had occupied him during his adult life – images and sounds recalled to him more and more his childhood or his early youth. His memories of the countryside became overpowering: the river, the willows, the orchards, the stubble fields in autumn, the country roads washed clean after rain. Sometimes he saw himself in these landscapes, or his parents, his brother, a girl who had died young, Mara. The village noises were in his ears, and the barking of the dogs. Tensely he awaited the sounds, and tensely he looked at the unmoving pictures of that world.

Everything stood still, even time itself.

He was taken off four times to be interrogated and each time he said nothing. They could hardly guess that he was already too remote and that they were not strong enough, even with their shouting and their trick lights, to recall him from his countryside.

After the fourth interrogation a man appeared in his cell who said he was a doctor. Before going he said in a whisper:

‘Be careful, comrade. Madhouses are dreadful places all over the world, but here . . . Pull yourself together. Try to hope, and then you’ll despair – which is normal. Can you hear what I’m saying?’

'You're right. I don't despair because I have nothing left to hope for.'

'But that's entirely abnormal. Only dead men or extreme psychotics lose their capacity for hope or despair, which incidentally is the same thing.'

'Yes, I'm a dead man.'

'No. A man isn't dead through wanting to be. He either has to die or else to commit suicide.'

'No. You don't understand. For those in whom I shall live on I am already dead. In them my after-life has already started. What's happening here is nothing but a futile technical delay.'

'You're mad!' the doctor shouted, but he quickly regained control of himself when he heard the warden hurrying towards the cell. 'No, you're just faking. You're quite normal, entirely normal.'

After this interview the little red-haired man often came back, particularly during the night when the cold kept Vasso awake.

He was awake when they came to fetch him. It seemed a long way to go. Since it occurred to him that this might be his last walk, he stopped. One of the men in uniform said, not unkindly:

'Come on, come on! You're not there yet!'

They set off again. What he saw were the white steps in front of the schoolhouse. It was a vision, as he knew, yet he was walking towards them. They were a long way off, but he had plenty of time and he was going the right way. White steps in the sun, in the good warm sun, the tender, warm, tender sun, the tender . . .

That was the last word that accompanied the last vision. He fell forwards, down the stone steps.

3

'Life goes on, of course. It's never done anything else, this wonderful life they all make such a fuss about,' Karel said. He was sober again now. 'And if you're thinking of shouting that Vasso was irreplaceable I'll tell you this: nobody had any intention of trying to replace him, since he had already become superfluous. As usual, the Super-Karel shot a corpse. Lenz is now the leader of the Party. Winter is fighting in Spain. One of these days he'll fall like a frozen sparrow tumbling noiselessly off a telegraph wire. A gigantic body dropping down and yet without a sound.'

'Vasso dead. Soennecke dead,' Doino repeated.

'But your old Stetten is alive. Go back to him. Vasso prophesied you would.'

‘Yes, he foresaw that. That was the way he lived, with his eyes fixed on the future. He heard the grass growing that the Karels trample underfoot. He said that too. Still, you didn’t dare to slander him, neither him nor Soennecke.’

‘There’s a simple explanation for that. Crime mustn’t be wasted.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘I mean that others can now be accused and found guilty of the crimes that those two wouldn’t confess to. We have only a handful of crimes at our disposal, for trials of this sort, and we have to use them economically. Which is why I have been able to obtain this ruling for yourself; you are to withdraw into the utmost obscurity, to remain silent, to forget and be forgotten. In two years’ time you will be at perfect liberty to publish some scholarly work, say a treatise on the influence of something unimportant on something else unimportant in the Middle Ages. Later, when you’ve entirely calmed down, you’ll be allowed to go as far as the seventeenth century, but no farther. You’re not to touch the eighteenth, since there the danger of analogies being drawn begins. You see, a political corpse can’t be allowed to stink. You must become frozen meat. The alternatives are the ice-chest or suicide. Don’t be a fool. Choose the ice-chest.’

‘You’ve talked quite long enough, Karel. You’ve had all the last words. It’s time we were going our own ways.’

‘You want to be alone already. The ice-chest is calling.’

‘Go now, Karel. I can’t stand any more of your company. There is only one thing you want from me which is why they sent you. I’m to become silent, and at once, without wasting any time over it. Death or the ice-chest. Well, you can tell them I’ll keep my mouth shut. Not because they want me to, but because of the others, because this is a vile world of Hitlers and Slavkos. I won’t fight against you so long as they exist. I shall do my best to think only of them, day and night, and to forget you. Only that way will I be able to keep silent in this era of Karels and Super-Karels. But now go!’

‘I haven’t yet said my very last word. You’ll listen to that if I have to tie you to your chair. Remember this: no man dies guiltless, because no man has lived guiltlessly. If they’d killed me over there you’d have assumed that there must have been some truth in Mara’s suspicions about me. “Perhaps the technician Karel is a shady creature, after all.” You said that to Soennecke in Prague. You didn’t add that that was the way you had all wanted me to be, the way you had needed me.’

‘Why should I have said that? Soennecke knew what you did.’

‘But I never asked to do that. It always disgusted me. I wanted to go

back to my trade union work, and I was never allowed to. 'Just a few more weeks, a few more months, and you can go.' That's what I was told. And then something unpleasant happened. No one asked what it was. It was more comfortable not to know. You understand what I'm talking about?

'No.'

'You're lying. You know. You knew from the very beginning, from the moment it started.'

'I only guessed. I never knew.'

'Because you didn't want to know. Because it was a distasteful business. Do you remember when I came to stay with you in Paris? I had a bad attack of flu. Do you remember how I began to tell you about it, and you became uncomfortable and said you had an appointment and had to go out? Do you remember saying: "Karel, you've got a high temperature. Why not wait until you're better and tell me all about it then?" You refused to listen.'

'You were feverish. I was protecting you from yourself.'

'I'm not feverish now. I won't let you protect me from myself.'

His story started off clearly enough, and the broad outline was simple, but bit by bit it changed. Karel frequently interrupted himself to bring in other anecdotes. It was as though he were deliberately going off at tangents, deliberately wasting time, because he dreaded reaching the essential part of what he had to say. He grew increasingly unsure of himself. The simplest words seemed suddenly to escape him and he could find them again only with the greatest difficulty. The very tone of his voice changed, becoming cracked.

When they arrested him, just before the *coup d'état*, they knew of course that he was the technician who was the focal point of the illegal organisation. Slavko stopped at nothing, but Karel wouldn't speak. No cunning, no torture, could break his resistance.

'Do you remember once showing me a self-portrait by some old painter? I've forgotten what the connection was, but you said to me then: "When being tortured it's no use just thinking 'No!'" No may keep you strong for the moment, but it can't last, and it leads in the end to submission and even to crime. During torture the best thing to do is seize hold of some positive thought and not to let it go, no matter what happens. I remembered what you'd said, Doino, before it was too late. And I thought about Zlata all the time. Each time I came round from unconsciousness I clung to the thought of her.'

That went on for seventeen days. On the eighteenth Slavko said to him:

'No interrogation today! No interrogation tomorrow. No interrogation the next day. I've had enough of you. You bore me so that you've made me get twice as drunk as I usually do. Nobody, of course, cares about the state of my liver. Did I say nobody? That's not quite true. There is one person in the world who has human feelings for me. Zlata. That's right, your Zlata.'

Thereupon he was left in peace for a week. A doctor even came and treated his knee and his back and his fingers. Good food was brought him from a restaurant, and wine with each meal, and cigarettes and novels.

One morning Slávko came to his cell, quite alone. He was entirely sober and looked pale and worried. He said:

'Make up your mind and quickly. I'm giving you a free choice in the matter. Either you'll talk and spill the lot, as you should, or else you won't talk and I'll let you go, and you'll never, do you understand, never see your Zlata again. Make up your mind at once and don't bore me.'

Karel replied:

'I've nothing to say.'

'So you give up Zlata?'

'I've nothing to say.'

It was about another month before they let him go. His wounds were almost completely healed, and even his knee was getting better. It didn't hurt so unbearably if he walked with a great deal of care. His finger-nails had begun to grow again, too.

So he hobbled out into freedom. Zlata wasn't there. He didn't have the key to her room with him, so he sat down on the top step outside the door that led to her attic and waited. They'd let him out at four in the afternoon. He sat on that step all evening and all night. In the morning Mara arrived. The comrades, having heard that he had been liberated, were expecting him. When he hadn't come, Mara - it would be her - had thought of looking for him at Zlata's.

'There she found me, after that night. She stood there, three steps below where I was sitting. She stared at me for a while and then she asked: "Why did they let you out? Did you talk?" I answered: "I've nothing to say." I said that automatically. For three months I'd said nothing else. She drew back for a moment and then she understood. She came up the steps and put her arms around me and kissed me. It was too late, a minute too late, an eternity too late.'

She helped him to get up, but he couldn't walk downstairs as his knee was hurting too much. She lifted him on to her back and carried him down four flights.

She wanted to take him to a village where he could be looked after; also then he'd be out of the clutches of Slavko, who might be playing cat and mouse with him. It would be wiser for him to go into hiding. But he wanted to find Zlata. Yet nobody knew where she was. A well-known lawyer went to Slavko and somebody intervened with Belgrade - they could find no trace of her. Her parents had received a short note in which she'd told them not to worry; she had had to go abroad in a hurry and would be back in about ten days. That was five weeks ago.

Karel finally gave up looking for her and went to the village and waited. Then came the *coup d'état*. Every man was needed, and he went back to work. There were actions to be carried out that required insane courage, far too dangerous to be entrusted to another if it was possible to do them oneself. He went through all the danger, and nothing happened to him. He put it to the test. He was deliberately careless, and still nothing happened to him. That was when people first began to suspect him. He went to see Vasso, who was already living in hiding.

'I said to him: "There's something wrong with me. Slavko's sparing my life. Why?" And he replied, without looking at me: "If he's really doing so, and it's not just one of his filthy tricks, then it can only be on account of Zlata. As you undoubtedly know, she's living with him." Do you understand? Everybody at that time knew all about it except me. From their point of view, why should anyone bother about Karel's girl at such a time as that? After all, she was only one among so many.'

From then on Karel's story became difficult to follow. He tried to make Doino understand all that the girl had meant to him. Yet he couldn't do so. Each word, as he said it, seemed to him the wrong one, unconnected with what he was really trying to express. In the middle of it all he began to talk about his sister, who at first seemed to have nothing whatever to do with it all. In terms of astounding naïveté he vaunted her purity and her goodness: it was her particular quality that the most evil men became good when they came in contact with her. Now Zlata resembled this sister except that she was younger and more attached to life and love, and finally to the Party. And he, he loved her so intensely that he didn't even want to share her with the Party. He would have liked to keep her hidden, all for himself. But she insisted on doing everything that he did, no matter how dangerous it might be. She'd burn with him and freeze with him. She'd said so herself. And it was the truth.

'When did you hear the story about Zlata, Doino?'

'After Andrei's murder and the death of Vojko. When I began to

have suspicions. Go on. Tell me more. I know almost nothing except that Slavko had got Zlata to come and live with him.'

It was a few days later that he ran into Slavko. It was not an accident, of course. Slavko had come to tell him that Zlata was in danger of losing her life. Karel replied that that meant nothing to him. But the police commissioner went on and on, and finally Karel accompanied him to a house in the suburbs where he saw Zlata again.

'What shall I do, Doino? I must tell you the whole story, but I can't. I can't go on. It's as though I were trying to fight my way through barbed wire. But you must see what it all leads up to. Ask me questions, and I'll tell you yes or no. Like that you can piece it together. Help me!'

Doino ought to have looked at him now and touched his arm. But ever since childhood he had always been paralysed by shyness when he had to look into the eyes of a man whose face was twisted with humiliation. He knew that a humiliated man can only be helped by one who has no doubts concerning his real dignity, and who can sincerely make him believe that.

'It doesn't matter. Let's leave it for another time.'

'There won't be any other time. Ask me questions!'

'All right. So you went there and saw Zlata. She'd threatened to commit suicide, which was why the swine had come to find you. Besides, he wanted to get rid of her.'

'No.'

'All right. Then he wanted you to calm Zlata down and talk sense to her. She loved you and she'd only slept with the policeman because she knew what he was doing to you and that otherwise he'd kill you in the end. In fact, she did it to save you. Don't be annoyed by what I'm going to say now, Karel – I don't much care for melodramatic stories. And perhaps that's only part of the truth. She wanted to save you, which is normal enough, but – you spoke of her purity – perhaps she wanted to save Slavko too. Once a woman sets out to save men's souls she's more easily had in bed than any merry widow.'

'Don't talk that way. You never knew Zlata.'

'Is she dead?'

'Yes. Drowned. Suicide.'

'So it's all said and done and the story's over.'

'Nothing's said. You're thinking of Vasso and getting your revenge on me.'

'Yes, I'm thinking of nothing but him. Since he died that way everything's become problematical. Will you tell me what point there was in your letting yourself be tortured in silence in order to save him'

from danger – I'm talking about the time they pulled out your fingernails? You were destined to protect him, and you handed him over to his murderers. And even the destruction of Zlata, and your lamentations have become futile in consequence. The fact that presumably you shared secrets with Slavko, as well as sharing that woman, has now also become quite unimportant.'

'You haven't understood. I never shared any secrets with Slavko. I went abroad at once. I didn't want to come back and live near Zlata ever again. But they sent me back. They ordered me to get in touch with her again. I fought against this order the way a man would fight, for his life when he was being sucked into a whirlpool. I had to give in, to go down into the depths. I had to live in the shadows, in a shady nightmare. That way the apparatus could be saved and the lives of many comrades too. And don't forget, you immaculate Doino, that it was me who protected you and that that was how I was able to do so. I guarded your every step when you were in our country, so that you never bruised your foot against a stone. I paid the price, I, and nobody else.'

'And Andrei, and Vojko. And others as well.'

'No. That's not true. I'd fixed everything so that Andrei could get out of the country safely. In spite of my warning he went to see his girl. Slavko knew about this girl through Zlata. And Vojko? It's true I didn't protect him. So far as the Party was concerned he was finished. Why should I have bothered about him? For all of them the living and the dead too, there's only been one man sacrificed – me. What's so tragic about death then? Why do you make something so dramatic out of it? But me, all those years you let me live in a . . .

He broke off and got to his feet. He busied himself with his travelling bag.

'I didn't know,' Doino said. 'Vasso didn't know. Perhaps he didn't want to know. But you should have talked to him about it, at the time when you were first given that assignment. Why didn't you?'

Doino waited in vain for an answer. Only when Karel was ready to leave, his bag in his hand, and standing by the door did he say:

'You've grasped this. Among us, whether we're alive or dead there's no man who is guiltless. And yet by comparison with the others we're saints. So there's no man who has the right to judge us. Don't forget that, Doino, now that you're leaving us. Keep quiet. Say nothing for a long time. Don't think of the people who killed Vasso. Don't think of the people who forced me down into the slime long before. Think of those others, the ones for whom Vasso lived. You can only hate us if you manage to forget Slavko. Don't forget him – ever!'

'I'll pay the bill downstairs. I've left you a revolver and some money on the little table over there — enough to get you to Vienna and Stetten, to your ice-chest.'

A few hours later Doino went back to Paris.

CHAPTER III

I

SHE entered the room without knocking. As soon as she saw him she made a move towards him, to embrace him. He said:

'Close the door after you. Collect your things and get out!'

'What's the matter with you, Doino? You look so peculiar!'

He didn't reply. Only now did she understand, and she took a step backwards, as though to be nearer the door.

'If it's on account of your papers, you might at least let me have a chance to tell you why I gave them to them.' He didn't look at her. 'I was only trying to do my best for you.' She came up to him and took his hands. 'Your hands are cold. I'll make you a nice cup of hot coffee.'

'Take your things and get out.'

She tried without success to look into his eyes. Then, slowly, she began packing up her possessions. There wasn't much, a nightdress, a dressing-gown, her toilet things. They all made one small parcel, wrapped in newspaper. Her eyes filled with tears. She couldn't go away like this. She began talking to him again, but he just sat there, motionless, his eyes closed.

She went out and came back again. She'd forgotten her package. She said:

'You never loved me. If you had, it would have all been different. Don't let me go away like this. Say something, anything.'

She sat down on the bed and waited. After a while she went away. That afternoon Edi came.

'The concierge is complaining about you. She says you won't leave your room and she can't get in to clean it. She also says you've had nothing to eat for two days except dry bread. Are you ill, Faber? Are you broke? I can lend you a little money if you need it.'

'Thank you, Rubin. Do you still give your bridge lessons?'

'Yes, but only for a little longer. We're really going soon.'

'You've been saying that for three years. It's bad for you and Relly, and for the child. What keeps you here?'

'Nothing, really, now, I think. But you know how long it always takes me to say goodbye. Three years to take my leave of Europe isn't excessive. On the average it takes me six years to break off relations with a human being — that is reckoned from the moment when I've decided to break them off. I imagine this must be a Jewish weakness.'

'I'm a Jew too.'

'Exactly. And how long have you been breaking away from the Party? And you still haven't done so finally.'

'I have.'

'What? For God's sake, what's happened?' Edi jumped to his feet and stared at Doino with intensity. 'Have you found a new road at last?'

'No. I left the old road because it wasn't leading in the right direction. It was going the other way. I've jumped off into nothingness. Perhaps there's a footpath that leads out of that.' And since Edi kept staring at him, he added, smiling: 'You must be pleased.'

'Yes, of course I am. Wait a minute. I'll be right back.'

After a little he returned with Relly. He had to leave almost at once as some elderly ladies were expecting him for bridge.

They talked about little Paul, Relly's son, who was at present with friends in the country. She told him the latest bright remarks the boy had made. They discussed the various difficulties that Edi still had to overcome before he could finally embark with his family. In America he'd go back to his work once again, and he might even find himself. They spoke once again of the curious effect that being a political émigré in Paris had on men such as Edi.

Relly waited for Doino to start talking about himself, to start complaining at long last. Now that he needed help, she felt herself incapable of giving it. When their conversation had petered out once more, she summoned up courage to ask the question.

'Vasso?'

'Yes. They murdered him.'

'Avenge his death. Not just on his account. On yours too. Don't brood about what they did to him. Think of what you'll do to his murderers.'

'I shall do nothing. There's still Hitler, and Spain, and men like Slavko. I shall keep quiet.'

'You aren't capable of doing that.'

'I shall have to learn how, or else die. I can crawl away and hide in a dark corner — only there's nowhere for me to go.'

'The world isn't empty just because Vasso's dead.'

'No, but now it's filled with enemies, the old ones and the new ones too. And the old ones don't become any more attractive, just because the new ones have proved themselves to be so utterly base.'

'I don't understand that. Tell me what I can do to help you.'

'Only if there were any love and gentleness inside myself could gentleness help me. But I have none, absolutely none. If I were to see myself drowning I might feel sorry for myself; I wouldn't raise a finger to save myself, though.'

'I can't listen to you talking that way, Doino. It hurts me too much.'

'You're right, Relly, it's just empty words. Once I can manage to sleep again, and eat, and get up enough strength to leave this chair and go out of this filthy room, then I'll be able to think less about Vasso. I shall read and write and try to find work. Perhaps that will be tomorrow, or even tonight. Please make me some coffee.'

But the days went by and the nights. Relly and Edi watched over him continually. He dozed, but he didn't sleep properly. With difficulty he managed to swallow a little bread, but nothing more. Bit by bit he had relapsed into complete silence. Edi decided to try giving him a shock. There was the business about Josmar, which was why Edi had come to see Doino in the first place. Josmar, it seemed, had been left severely wounded between the lines. In order not to fall into enemy hands he had obeyed the instructions given for such cases and had shot himself - somewhere near Teruel.

It wasn't a shock. Doino simply nodded and said nothing.

'But there's more to it than just that,' Edi went on. 'You see, a few days before his death Josmar, the believer, wrote a letter to me, the unbeliever, which he managed to get posted on this side of the French frontier. Listen, Doino, it's quite extraordinary what he writes: "It means nothing to anybody except me, but all the same I shall write to you about it, Edi, to you in particular because you were in no way involved in it. I'm guilty of the death of a young woman called Erna Lüttge. However I may be killed, it will be for this guilt that I shall die, and so my death will be an expiation. This is of extreme importance to me now. For I have realised that the only thing which counts in this world is helping the poor. And I have never done the slightest thing to help any poor person." Does that mean anything to you? You see, I know nothing about this Erna Lüttge. I've never even heard of her before.'

As Doino said nothing, he went on:

'Now listen to this bit. "I let myself be bullied into giving evidence

against Soennecke. I put my name to the most grotesque and slanderous lies. And Soennecke was my closest friend. . . . I loved music above all else in the world, and for years I've had nothing to do with music because I was frightened of it as if it were an evil woman who might seduce me. I've remained true to the Party and to no one and nothing else. But if Bach were to outlive the Party?" That, of course, is no sort of argument.'

'Why not?' Relly asked. 'Naturally ability to survive counts. If one knew for certain what was going to survive and what wasn't that would be the strongest argument of all. It'd be the only really decisive one that would make a man certain what was worth living for. What, do you think, Doino?'

But Doino said nothing.

They hesitated a long time before making up their minds to tell Stetten about what had happened and to ask for his help. He was so old, and in the past few years so much unhappiness had engulfed him.

It was only while writing the letter that Relly realised the extent of the oppressive weight that she had been carrying for the past days. At last she could cry, overcome by suffering, as though she were weeping for a man dying in agony.

2

Yes, Stetten had been engulfed in much unhappiness during these years. His elder son was dead now too, killed in the purge of June 30, 1934, that Hitler had ordered. The reason was a stupid, 'highly regrettable' confusion of names – a man called Walter Stetter had been on the list of those to be liquidated. As Stetten's wife had once encouraged her younger son to go off to the war as a volunteer, so she had encouraged her elder one, her darling, to leave Austria and place himself at the Führer's disposal. And this woman had had to stand by while men in black uniforms shot her son on his own doorstep. She went back to the husband she had left for ever, less than five months before, in order to devote the rest of her life to her son, to Adolf Hitler, and to the Greater German Reich. Stetten found her and his daughter-in-law, the 'overblonde Marlies,' now in an advanced state of pregnancy, installed in his house one day, the house in which he had soon accustomed himself to living alone. He had just come back from Russia. His wife was a broken woman, terribly altered by unhappiness. He didn't try to console her – he'd never believed in consolation – but he did honestly do his best to make life tolerable for her. He hoped that the birth of her grandchild would awaken her from her nightmare.

That hope was not to be realised. The old woman's mind was closed against the external world and nothing could arrest her decline. Only one emotion remained strong and vivid within her: a hatred and disgust for life. Her spirit was crushed; nor could she find the only way out, death. In her moments of clarity, which became increasingly infrequent, while Stetten held her hands or stroked her hair, she would talk on and on about her guilt; she should have redecorated their home many years ago, put in new furniture, and made it all more comfortable for her husband. She blamed herself for not having paid enough attention to his wishes. She never spoke of her sons. Finally, on the insistence of the doctors, she was moved to an institution. There she died shortly afterwards, her mind completely darkened.

Quite contrary to all expectations, Marlies too remained apathetic towards the child. She hated the idea of being a widow with the added burden of a fatherless baby. She wasn't born to be a widow, as she repeated over and over again with foolish arrogance. She received friendly letters from the high, indeed the highest, dignitaries of the Third Reich. They invited her to come back home. Everything would be done to make her forget as soon as possible the regrettable misunderstanding that had widowed her so early in life. Stetten encouraged her to return to Munich and to begin a new life. Little Agnes could stay with him. He'd bring her up. He'd be both mother and father to her. Marlies had only to sign a few papers, handing over all her rights to the child's grandfather and in exchange he offered her, until such time as she should marry again, a sufficient income to ensure her freedom from all financial worries. Marlies eagerly accepted this proposition and went home. Some thirteen months after the 'misunderstanding' she married a very senior officer in the black army.

Agnes was now almost three, a pretty, clever and excessively spoilt little girl. She knew the power she had over her grandfather. Stetten was grateful to her for abusing it so seldom. For a whole lifetime he had made it his business not to be the dupe of any person or any emotion, of any idea or of any movement – and now he gave in, and let himself become the dupe of a tiny child. In serious conversation he would quote remarks that Agnes had made, attaching to them a meaning that, needless to say, was quite different from hers. He developed the trick of mispronouncing words the way she did. For decades past he had never had the faintest lack of trust in his own powers of memory but he noted down everything connected with the child.

He continued to observe the events that were leading up to the new world war. His antagonism to his age and to society grew always more

pronounced. But he was happy. Agnes, for him, was something outside all historical significance; the laws of growth and decay did not apply to her; she was existence, she was the eternal present. He would sit until late at night in her room, sometimes until dawn, listening to her breathing. What drew him to her most was gratitude. The little girl did something for him that was greater than anything life had given him heretofore: she existed.

He stood by the dining-room window and waved. Agnes would surely look round once more, and possibly twice, before she reached the corner of the street – that, unfortunately, depended on the little girl's nurse. Now she was at the corner. Yes, she turned. He waved the letters he was holding, and she waved back. Then she disappeared.

Nothing from Faber again. It was many weeks since last he'd written. But the two letters were connected with him. Stetten smiled at the amusing coincidence. One was from Canada from Hanusia, the woman who had left Faber one morning while he slept. And he still had no idea what had happened to her: he still didn't guess that his old teacher might have had a hand in that business. And next to it was a letter from Relly Rubin, the woman whom Doino had left one evening without a word. Stetten had always had a weakness for very light comedy. He'd actually gone so far as to write one himself, which he sent to a theatrical director over a *nom de plume*, without success. The action all took place in one room, which was almost without walls, since he needed so many doors for his characters to pop in and out through – for they all kept just missing one another until the very last scene. It was because of the *dénouement* that Stetten enjoyed this sort of play; finally everybody found everybody else, all their problems were solved without effort, and they all lived happily ever after.

To see Hanusia's and Relly's letters lying there side by side amused Stetten. Hanusia wrote regularly, once a month, and her letters usually arrived about the 25th. She gave him news of little John's progress and of her own, for she was studying to be a social welfare worker. Sometimes she enclosed a photograph of the boy; he had her eyes, but the lower part of the face bore a striking resemblance to Doino's. That was a good farce too. Dear old Faber might know everything about the world, but he never even guessed that he had a son. The *dénouement* should be pretty good!

This time Hanusia wrote at greater length than usual. She was thinking of getting married. The man was a teacher, a Ukrainian by origin like herself. Johnny liked him and he loved the child. Now she

needed Hvrilo's death certificate. Since Stetten had made himself responsible for the burial and for the erection of a tombstone, he should have no trouble in getting hold of the certificate. She enclosed a photograph. It showed Hanusia, grown somewhat stouter but otherwise unchanged, a man with a tragic and solemn expression, and little Johnny. It was the classic family snapshot. Stetten put the photograph on one side immediately. This was not at all the outcome on which he had always reckoned. Besides, although Johnny was three months younger he was apparently considerably taller than Agnes.

Relly had a beautiful handwriting, but one that was not easy to read. Stetten skipped the first few words until he realised that the woman had written in great despair. He didn't yet know what the trouble was, but he suddenly felt an awful premonition. He looked for his magnifying glass. It wasn't in its usual place. He went into the nursery and finally, after ten minutes' search, he found it in the stomach of a doll.

'If it's just silent grief for his dead friends - then there's hope that it will gradually diminish: if it's the despair of appalling disillusion, then, too, there is hope. His sharp mind, his irony may bring him back to normal in a natural though painful way. But after watching him for days on end, a helpless witness to his collapse, I begin to fear more and more that it's not just grief or despair that is threatening him. . . Only you can save him. Please come before it is too late. He's sinking daily deeper into an abysmal silence. If you can't make him talk, if you can't revive his fatally flagging will to live, he'll just fade out of existence. I cannot find words to describe to you the appalling nature of his decline. I had never imagined that anguish could be so limitless, or that limitless anguish could be so dumb.'

He read the long letter through twice more. It expressed more clearly the young woman's own unhappiness than it described Doino's condition. He certainly needed help, whether it took the form of encouragement or of contradiction, but he didn't need to be saved. What could possibly happen in this world to make a man like Doino so weak that he would collapse unless somebody saved him? Nothing! It's an inexplicable mystery how a man can survive the death of a child, it involves an action of superhuman strength; however, that is almost always successfully achieved. By comparison, how easy it is to survive the death of the gods! Who should know that better than this man, Stetten's pupil?

The professor caught the night train for Paris. After considerable deliberation he decided not to take little Agnes with him on that long journey..

Stetten took the only armchair. Relly sat on the bed. Only a low stool was left for Doino. The professor was still out of breath after climbing up six flights of stairs, and he looked at Doino and smiled:

'Now everything's as it should be. You're seated on a stool: your hair hasn't been cut, you haven't shaved; the ashes that should be on your head we can forget, in view of the progressive nature of the century; all the same you should have torn the lapels of your jacket a little, underneath would perhaps be best. Then we'd have the complete picture of the devout Jew in mourning. I believe its called *shivah*, and supposed to last for seven days. Is that right?'

'You know everything, professor.'

'Nachally, as my Agnes would say. I'm disappointed in you, my friend. You were planning to turn the world topsy-turvy and you can't even find an original way of mourning. I hear that the gentlemen in Moscow have killed your friend, Vasso Militch. Of course, that's a great loss to you. But can you explain to me why this particular murder, following on so many others no less grotesque and not less atrocious, should not be justifiable? Up to now you've found a justification for everything, including far more appalling actions. Do you recall coming to see me in the autumn of 1914? I told you about Russia: I said then that never had I seen a more transparent, a bigger, or a more contemptible piece of fraud. And what did you reply?

'I remember.'

'Repeat what you said then.'

'We'll hide the fraud with lies, I said, and the lies will become truth and the fraud will be fraud no longer. If only we remain true to the revolution, the crooked will be made straight once again. That's what I said.'

'And why have you stopped believing that - that stuff about the crooked being made straight, and the lies turning into truths?'

'The fraud has ceased to be a means to an end. It is an institution. The abuse of power is no longer a roundabout approach, since for a few people power itself has become the only objective.'

'There's nothing new about that either. I proved to you, eighteen years ago, that evil means start by corrupting good ends and finish by replacing them. And what did you reply? What had been true up to now would be true no longer. The old rules no longer apply. We're building something new which will fashion new rules. That's what you said. Fraud is not fraud provided one can look at it with new,

'eyes - you said that too, my dear Dion. And let's have no half measures at this stage, please. Either you're wrong now - for some sentimental reason or other - and were right before; if that's the case, stop mourning for your friend and go back to the Party. Or else you're right now, which means that you were always wrong before; in that case you must admit it clearly and openly.'

Relly would have liked to restrain the old man. She had sent for a wise old friend; in his stead this harsh judge had arrived. But it might be a well thought out tactical approach. The one important thing was to get Doino to talk. Anxiously and apprehensively she listened to Stetten, who after all must know what he was aiming at. When Doino at last got up and began pacing up and down the room she, too, got up. She felt that this might be the turning point.

'Yes. I know I'm an old I-told-you-so,' Stetten went on. 'I know I enjoy being in the right. But you, you once said, didn't care about being right, you cared about ultimate truth. Well and good. And what's left. Weigh it up. I'd like to see whether or not you'll bow your head at the spectacle of a cause proved worthless, whether or not you'll abandon your pride. I want to find out what value your mourning has, if any. So speak!'

'This time you haven't understood, perhaps because it's all too remote from you. Hurt pride isn't the cause of the silence to which I am condemned, but the situation for which we ourselves are responsible. To speak out against the murderers of Vasso and Soennecke, and against myself as their spiritual accomplice and as a "false witness" - there's nothing at the moment I'd like to do more. However, if I were to do that now, today, when such huge events of decisive importance for mankind are in preparation, it would mean that I had automatically transferred my allegiance to the other side. There is no no-man's land between the front lines. If a man turns against one side he becomes, willy-nilly, the outpost of the other side - in this case, of those very people whom it is our urgent duty to destroy. Good God! Nothing would be easier than to admit that I was mistaken on every important point. But even that is forbidden us. If it's a question of pride, professor, you must see that that is another aspect of my tragedy: I cannot bow my head, I cannot renounce my pride, without by so doing becoming the arch-witness for the arch-enemy.'

'You're worse off than I thought. I'd hoped to find you at the bottom of the deepest abyss, and I came here to pull you out of it. Instead, you're only standing on the edge. Unfortunately you haven't yet fallen in, as by all the rules you should have done. You still imagine

that you can dictate to truth what function it is to fulfil. You abandon the Party, but you voluntarily remain a victim of the Party's idea of veracity – even when you've finally recognised it as a world-wide lie. I'm beginning to lose patience with you – and about time too, as you'll admit yourself.'

'I do admit it. Patience no longer exists, once a man is aware of the fact that he's using it. Only the revolutionary, for whom patience is the most difficult of all the virtues, is always conscious of it, and he mustn't lose it even though he may have become politically a corpse. But you ...'

'I know I've never been a revolutionary. I've never wanted to change the world with one blow. I've always mocked at those apostles who tried to make humanity fly straight up to heaven, and I've observed with respect and tenderness those tiny, unspeakably difficult movements, thanks to which humanity has now and then advanced a single millimetre. You count in months and years and are patient: I count in decades and centuries and am impatient. My little Agnes says of her favourite doll that it does everything so quickly it wakes up before its gone to sleep. In three days' time you'll be able to get to know Agnes and her revolutionary doll. Meanwhile it would be a good idea if you moved to my hotel. I've reserved a room for you there. Naturally this filthy hotel and this ghastly room are more in keeping with your present mood, but I'm afraid you'll have to do without the *décor*. So come along with me. Frau Relly will see to the liquidation of your affairs here. You need the services of a barber; there's a well-appointed bathroom at your disposal; and in the evening you'll invite us all to dinner in a really first-class restaurant. In two days' time we leave for Vienna. You'll be appointed editor-in-chief of the *Historical Review*, which will be a pleasant rest for you. Then, in a year or two, we'll leave the country, in time, I hope, to avoid being put into a camp by those swastika people. So now you know what your life is going to be.'

'Yes. On to the ice-chest!' Doino said with a smile.

'No. On to the barber's. You'll see, Frau Relly, that all our friend needs are two or three more good knocks on the head and he'll become an acceptable contemporary. If only you'd waited some ten years' more – you might have found in him a not altogether intolerable husband.'

Relly, who was already busying herself with Doino's suitcases, replied:

'I counted by days, which was a mistake, since a year contains so

'many days. But a woman can't reckon by decades, only by months at the most — the way she does when she's expecting a child.'

'Yes, that may well be true. An interesting subject, Dion, and one that you might turn your attention to in your retirement.'

'That would hardly be worth while,' Doino replied. 'The material for an historical thesis is lacking. It seems certain that different generations have measured time on a different scale, but we have no way of knowing how the change in attitude from one generation to another was effected. On the other hand, all the materials are to hand for a psychological study with an obvious conclusion. Our attitude towards time is based on a fixed perspective: namely, it is the varying intensity of the emotion of anticipation that conditions the time-scale. We go through time as we pass through an ante-room, a series of ante-rooms with no room beyond. If anticipation does not exist, time stops. Then time can only be measured by the progress of physical and social decay. And only for the dead could this measure be true; hence the religious swindles about eternity. For the living the measure is that which shall be, the non-existent seen in terms of their hopes and fears.'

'And so Doino added sentence to sentence. Listening to him Relly wondered whether he was really emerging from his despair, or whether his talk only hid his misery like a thin, though opaque, curtain. For even while he spoke his face remained as unmoving as a mask. Stetten, obviously didn't notice that. Perhaps he'd already forgotten his reason for coming here. He was listening thoughtfully, from time to time passing his left hand over his brow.'

Relly was glad when they were interrupted by Edi who came rushing into the room. He hardly had time to greet Stetten properly, so exciting was the news he brought. Josmar was alive! He'd arrived in Paris two days before, seriously but not dangerously wounded. The rumour about his death was, therefore, false, put out by those men who knew that he was supposed to die, 'according to plan'. Luckily the plan hadn't worked. Josmar had, in fact, been left between the lines, but his companions had come out that night and brought him back to their position. He was sent at once to a dressing-station and transferred two days later to the base hospital at Murcia. From there he'd made his way to France — with the help of friends, of course.'

'What do you find so exciting about this story Rubin? The fact that attempts to organise all life according to a conscious plan usually develops into systems of deliberate murder shouldn't surprise you.'

'That's not the point. The case of Josmar Goeben is . . .'

' . . . is as uninteresting as the young man in question. I remember

him. He was in Prague when I was there. During the conversation about the anarchist poet the Nazis murdered, he was one of those who condemned him to death all over again. If he'd died between the lines at Teruel, sent to his death by his comrades and by his Party, it'd have been a most suitable ending for him.'

Edi contradicted this and defended Josmar, who was now close to him again since he'd found him helpless and disillusioned. But Stetten, less patient than usual, kept interrupting him, and finally broke in with:

'I'd like you to try and understand what I'm saying, Rubin. I've always been on the side of the persecuted. I've pulled them out of the darkest corners in history, and tried to interpret the past from their point of view. And I've never expected them to be particularly noble or highminded, let alone to rise above the misery in their hearts. To me the victors have always been suspect and the persecutors contemptible. But the most contemptible creatures of all that I have ever come across in history are the persecuted who in a hand's turn become persecutors. Generally speaking, the Josmar Goebens are more decent and finer men than the stupid bourgeoisie and their muck-raking writers will admit. All the same they are far too bad to be mixed up in any great undertaking. They dirty it.'

Doino said:

'Wherever he was sent, Josmar always fought bravely, but he could never shake off his craving for belief. The need for an absolute turns humanity into a sewer, turns religion into Holy Church, and turns political ideas into police organisation. Josmar could stand the most nerve-racking danger for days on end, but he wouldn't last a minute without the absolute to rely on. That's why he and his sort have corrupted the movement. And I and my sort, we helped them to it. We're guiltier than they are.'

'I'm utterly sick of all this rubbish,' Relly said. She was really angry. 'Blessed be those men who talk about the weather or their business or women or cards. I've packed the cases, professor. I'll have them sent over to your hotel. Now take Doino and go!'

'What's upset you so?' Stetten asked with a smile. As Relly didn't answer, he went on, seriously:

'Don't misunderstand me, my dear, I don't want to set myself up as a judge. But whoever worries about his spiritual cleanliness these days has his work cut out for him to stop himself from becoming an accomplice, either consciously or unconsciously. It's possible to become one just by saying nothing. I have no objection to helping Goeben. I do refuse to waste pity on the pitiless. That's that! And now we'll go.'

To start with, neither of them spoke. They were both thinking of Vasso. Finally Djura said:

'I bring you Vasso's last message. It's easy to remember: "Don't waste your time thinking about the grass that has been trampled down. Think of the new grass. And never doubt for a moment that it'll spring up again." He said you'd understand.'

'I understand.'

'Then you know who trampled down the grass. What are you intending to do about it?'

'For the moment, nothing,' Doino replied. 'I'm going to withdraw, so that I may never doubt for one minute that the new grass will grow.'

'It won't spring up on its own, you know that.'

They were seated in a very small park, opposite Notre Dame. They avoided looking at one another. Doino said:

'Our defeat in Germany has long ceased being an event and has become a state of affairs. Which is why Hitler will start a war. Perhaps if Soennecke had been allowed to continue his work, the Party might have arisen there. But they didn't want that. So we've lost our race "against war. The vital thing now is that Hitler should not come out of it victorious, for once he's been defeated we can start again from the beginning. But it's time now to start thinking about the foundations on which a fresh start can be built. It's time to turn to the young men again, to educate the Andreis and Soenneckes and Vassos of tomorrow.'

'You talk of laying foundations, so you must mean new ones. The failures we made must be clearly understood before a new start can be made, and we mustn't be afraid of exposing them. Do you agree, Doino?'

'Yes, except that I can see no new cause. I'll look. Meanwhile until the present battle is decided I've condemned myself to remain politically a corpse.'

'That doesn't matter.'

'You're wrong; it does matter, for example, not to be taking part in the war in Spain.'

'I've just come from Spain. We've lost that war no matter how long it may linger on. And that's not because the filthy Western Democracies wanted the Spaniards to fight Hitler and Mussolini with their bare fists and were scared they might win all the same. No, we've lost because we spread discord everywhere and only unity promised success. The Spaniards are fighting as well as they can, sometimes like Don Quixote and sometimes like Sancho Panza, but they're already beginning to ask

themselves for whom it is that they are really shedding their blood. They haven't yet seen through all the tricks, but they've already begun to guess that many of their liberators hate freedom. We've lost Spain - the battle there is becoming less and less our concern. There's no need for you to take part in it.'

'What are you going to do yourself, Djura?'

'I'm going home. They'll lock me up for six months or two years. That way I'll re-establish contact with the best of the comrades and I'll do my best to lead them back to Vasso.'

'But Vasso's dead.'

'In 1573 Mara's ancestors killed Mathias Gubec. Three hundred and fifty years later this same Gubec altered the whole course of her father's life and brought her to the peasants and finally into the movement. Vasso has been seen during the past few weeks: simultaneously in Serbia, in Bosnia, on the coast and in Slovenia. There are leaflets circulating about him. "No matter where one of us dies and no matter who kills him, think only of one thing: think of the cause for which he died. In the cause for which he died he lived on!" That is the last sentence of the leaflet.'

'Did Vasso tell you that himself?'

'Yes. In the night when his teeth were chattering with cold. Try though we did, we couldn't make him feel warmer. He was always cold. And yet it was he who made us all men again, there in that cell. Even to men who had betrayed and debased themselves he managed to give the courage to be true again - and that in the land of debasement!'

'The thought of their having killed Vasso is not so unbearable as the idea of their having humiliated him.'

'You're wrong. They never succeeded in doing so. He grew greater all the time during those days, unencumbered by doubt or hope or despair.'

'One hardly knows how another person lives. There's no way of knowing how he dies.'

'He died the way we should have wanted him to die. When they came for him he knew that this was his last walk. He accepted that fact and thought no more about it. He went without affectation, his head neither higher nor lower than usual. He thought: "Andrei, too, they killed just before dawn." And there was a great tenderness in Vasso when he thought of Andrei and of the people who were still sleeping and of the sun that would soon rise and of a small child that would slowly drink its mug of warm milk. And at the end, just before the

bullet hit, he thought gratefully of Mara who is still alive, and of the Doinos 'ane the Djuras . . . and so many others.'

'Perhaps it happened that way, but it's no real consolation to think so.'

'Only people who want to forget look for consolation. We don't want to forget. Vasso lives.'

At last they looked at one another.

'So long as I live Vasso shall pass through our villages and the workers shall see him, in the early evening, standing by the factory gates. Leaflets about him will flutter through the land. Nobody has power over him any more. Mara is there, you are there, Winter is there.'

'Winter has been condemned.'

'No, saved. I gave him poison. The doctor reported all the symptoms of a severe heart attack and he was supposed to go to hospital. I insisted on taking him with me to the neighbourhood of the Yugoslav frontier to die. That way his corpse could be taken home and he could be given a big funeral. "Vladko, severely wounded in Spain, with his last strength returns to the homeland, bringing with him a message of freedom to the Party of freedom." They agreed to that and he's here now, already recovered. Winter is dead. Vladko, Vasso's pupil and friend, lives on. And I managed to rescue one other, the Prussian Goeben. But he's nothing to do with us. Apart from that he's quite crazy and talks about nothing except guilt and ethics and music.'

'Why did you help him?'

'He might be useful to us later on, in the trial that we'll hold one day, as a witness for Herbert Soennicke.'

They hadn't noticed the heavy drops, and the sudden downpour took them by surprise. They were the only two left in the park. People sheltering in the neighbouring doorways watched with friendly amusement the two lunatics in the rain.

'Another advantage of the freedom here,' Djura said. 'In a totalitarian country we couldn't sit like this. It would make us suspect. The bourgeois democracies allow people to be unhappy in their own way.'

'Paris lets you. It's the cleverest city in the world because it's experienced all the stupidities of which man is capable and has survived them all. *Il faut de tout pour faire un monde* the people over there in the doorways are saying. Therefore the world needs two clowns sitting in the rain. If they haven't bothered to move, well, neither has the cathedral.'

'Why shouldn't the new movement start from Paris?' Djura asked thoughtfully. 'There are so many clever men here. Claude Florins, the